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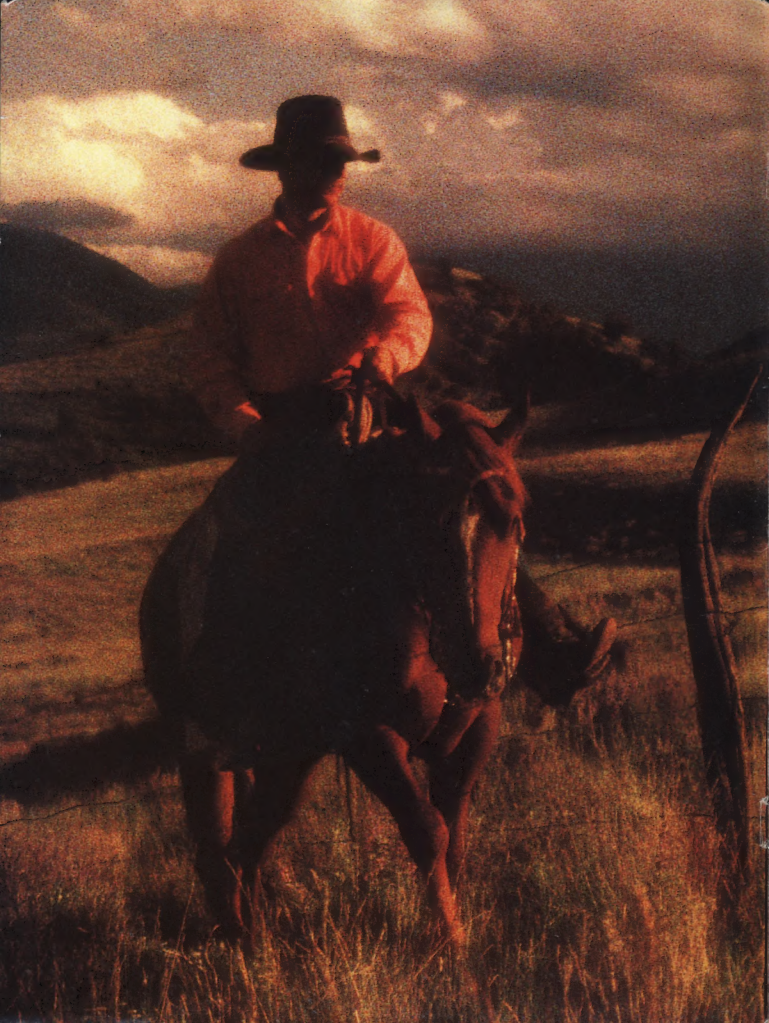

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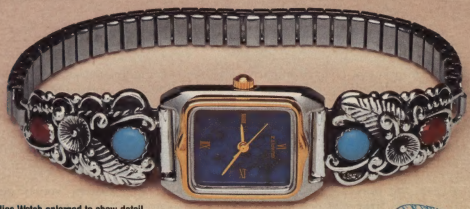

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FIRST TIME DIRECT FROM AMERICA'S SOUTHWEST

BY BEAU L'AMOUR

Welcome to the premiere issue of *Louis L'Amour Western Magazine*. It is the goal of this magazine to bring you a selection of the finest short western fiction being written today. In addition, you will find biographical stories of people who lived on the frontier, and travel articles that will make the West—both old and new—come alive whether you're an armchair traveler, or want to know the real stories behind the places you may plan to visit.

My father published his first western story, "The Town No Guns Could Tame," in the September 1940 issue of *New Western* magazine. Although he had had several other stories published, it was only the fifth that he had actually gotten paid for.

He would go on to sell many more short stories, but only one other western ("One Last Gun Notch") until 1946. After that, he often sold two or three a month, and was able to move to Los Angeles and live (sometimes barely) on the money he made writing.

The fiction magazines in those days provided an incredible training ground for beginning writers. They purchased massive amounts of material every year, and their doors (or mailboxes) were open to anyone who might have a story to tell. The circulation of these magazines was enormous. This, by itself, was important to young writers because even if they were paid poorly (or not at all), at least they would be read.

Many of the fiction magazines went out of business around the time of the Korean War. When I was growing up, Dad would often reminisce about the days of the pulps and wonder where new writers would get the kind of experience that had helped him become a success.

When my family was offered this opportunity by Dell Magazines we jumped at it, feeling that it was a project that would have been very close to my father's heart. We hope that *Louis L'Amour Western Magazine* will nurture a new generation of men and women whose interest is the American frontier.

The western of my father's day was strangling in a framework of diminishing possibilities. The crude condition of civilization on the frontier makes it a perfect setting for stories that examine morality. Unfortunately, this was often simplified into "The Good Guys vs. The Bad Guys"—a division of roles that often left no room in between for real human beings. The flamboyant, picaresque characters of western history were distilled into static heroes whose personalities could not evolve because to grow or change was seen as being weak.

Westerns were also an "action" genre, and that precluded stories of the staggering courage of simple people who battled disease, poverty, and starvation just to make it through another year. I hope that in the coming years, there will be room for the stories of little heroes as well as big.

My father always believed that the West was a far wider place than just the terrain on the other side of the river from Council Bluffs, Iowa. I think that the West was and is a laboratory of American dreams—a place where our traits as a nation and a people, good and bad, are tested to the extreme.

It still contains immeasurable natural beauty, but it is also where we find the squalid archaeology of many of its residents rusting in weed-grown yards. It is a place where men's and women's single-minded belief in themselves led them to courageously settle untamed lands, and yet they in turn were driven from the land by ruthless developers.

Our history of the West has been that of a war to subjugate its various properties: the taming of its wilderness by settlers, the planting of its plains, the damming and diversion of its rivers—removal of the very features that make it what it is.

I say this not in judgment, but to show that there is a dramatic tension in every line of our history. It is an area about which great stories can still be written—a place where we can examine both the light in our souls and the darkness in our hearts.

You will see no stories by my late father in these pages. This is a space that he posthumously provides to others—a chance for them to be heard, a chance for them to share their dreams with the public, just as he did for over fifty years.

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LIGHT,
SMOOTH,
MELLOW

BURGADE'S CROSSING

Quincannon heard the calliope ten minutes before the Walnut Grove stage reached Dead Man's Slough. The off-key notes of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" woke him out of a thin doze; he sat up to listen and then peer through the coach's isinglass window. He saw nothing but swamp growth crowding in close to the levee road. Sounds carried far here in the river delta, particularly on cold, early-winter afternoons such as this one. And the rusty-piped sound of the calliope was familiar even at a distance: the Island Star had drifted downriver and tied up at Burgade's Crossing, just as he'd expected.

by

BILL PRONZINI

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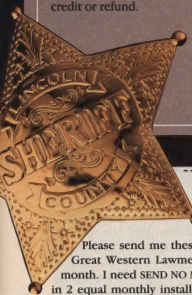

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The Official Collection of the Badges that Won the West.

The slough was choppy, which caused the ferry to buck and squirm even with its heavy load. Again, Quincannon felt worry at what lay ahead tonight.

The stage's only other passenger, a mild little whiskey drummer named Whittle, lowered the dime novel he'd been reading and said tentatively, "Sounds festive, doesn't it?"

Whittle hid his face again behind the book. It was plain that he was intimidated by a man twice his size who wore a bushy, gray-flecked freebooter's beard and was given to ferocious glowers when in a dark mood. He was pretending to be a drummer himself, of patent medicines, and Whittle had tried to engage him in brotherly conversation by telling a brace of smutty stories. Quincannon had glowered him into silence. Ordinarily he was friendly and enjoyed a good joke, but today he had too much on his mind for frivolous pursuits. Besides, Whittle's stories were graybeards that hadn't been worth a chuckle even when they were new.

The *Island Star*'s calliope stopped playing for a time, started up again with the same tune just before they reached the north-bank ferry landing at Dead Man's Slough. The coach's driver clattered them off the levee road, down an embankment steep enough to cause the rear wheels to skid and the brake blocks to give off dry squeals. Quincannon had the door open and was already swinging out when the stage came to a halt.

A chill wind assailed him. Overhead, dark-edged clouds moved furtively; the smell of rain was heavy in the air. The coming storm would break before the passenger packet *Yosemite,* bound upriver from San Francisco, reached Burgade's Crossing at midnight. There were possible benefits in a stormy night, Quincannon thought bleakly, but the potential dangers far outweighed them.

He took a pipe from the pocket of his corduroy jacket, packed and lit it as he surveyed his surroundings. He had seen Burgade's Crossing from a distance several times, from the deck of one or another of the Sacramento River steamers, but he had never been here before. It was a sorry little backwater, with no attractions for anyone except the misguided souls who chose to live in or near it.

There was nothing on this side but the road and ferry landing; the town's buildings were all on the south bank. The ferry ran across Dead Man's a few hundred yards from where the slough merged with the much wider expanse of the Sacramento. West of the ferry, on the river, was a steamboat landing; east of the ferry, on the slough next to a continuation of the levee road, stood Burgade's Inn—a long, weathered structure built partly on solid ground and partly on thick pilings over the water. The rest of Burgade's Crossing ran east in a ragged line to where the slough narrowed and vanished among tangles of cattails and swamp oaks choked with wild grapevine. Its sum was a dozen or so buildings, a dozen or so shantyboats and houseboats tied to the bank, and a single sagging wharf.

The *Island Star,* Gus Kennett's store boat, was moored at the wharf. The calliope on her foredeck was again giving forth, monotonously, with "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The music had drawn a small crowd; Quincannon could see men, women, a few children clustered on the gangplank at the battered little steamer's waist.

He shifted his attention to the broad, flat-bottomed ferry barge. It had been tied on the south side, and at the stage driver's hail the ferryman had come out of his shack and was now winching it across. The scow was held by grease-blackened cables made fast to pilings on a spit of north-side land a hundred yards upslough. The current pushed the ferry across from shore to shore, guided by a centerboard attached to its bottom and by the ferryman's windlass.

When the barge nudged the bank, the ferryman quickly put hitches in the mooring ropes, collected the toll, then lowered the approach apron. The stage driver took his team of four aboard, their hooves and the coach's wheels clattering hollowly on the timbers. Quincannon, scowling and puffing on his pipe as if it were a bellows, followed on foot. A minute later the cable whined thinly on the windlass drum and the scow began moving again, back across.

The wind was stronger on open water, sharp with the smells of salt and swamp and impending rain. It made the slough choppy, which in turn caused the ferry to buck and squirm even with its heavy load. Again, Quincannon felt worry at what lay ahead tonight. Why the devil couldn't Noah Rideout have been sensible and spent another night—or bet-

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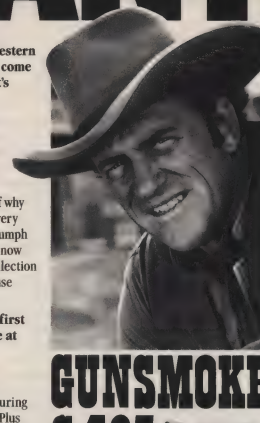

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Quincannon had to find out who wanted Noah Rideout dead...and to prevent the act of murder from taking place.

ter yet, another week—in San Francisco?

He touched the pocket where he'd stowed the telegram that had arrived for him in Walnut Grove this morning. Its contents were what had thrust him into his bleak mood:

> EFFORTS HERE STILL FRUITLESS STOP NJR RETURNING TONIGHT ON YOSEMITE STOP COULD NOT DISSUADE HIM COMMA STATES BUSINESS HERE FINISHED AND IS NEEDED AT HOME STOP LS ACCOMPANYING HIM BUT NO ONE ELSE COMMA REFUSED BODYGUARDS STOP URGENT YOU MEET HIM AT BURGADES CROSSING AT MIDNIGHT STOP
>
> SC

NJR was Noah J. Rideout, of course. LS was Leland Stannard, the foreman of Rideout's huge Tyler Island farm. And SC was Sabina Carpenter, the other member of Carpenter and Quincannon, Professional Detective Services.

There were still some narrow-minded dolts who questioned the wisdom of a former U.S. Secret Service operative entering into private partnership with a woman, even though Sabina had, like Kate Warne before her, worked for several years for Allan Pinkerton. The truth of the matter was, she was the equal of any man at detective work. In fact, Quincannon admitted grudgingly to himself, if never to Sabina or anyone else, she was not only his equal but in many ways his better. If her efforts in San Francisco were continuing to prove fruitless, then there was nothing to be found there.

The weight of the case was now all on his shoulders. And it was a dual burden: to find out, if he could, who wanted Noah Rideout dead; and to prevent, if he could, the act of murder from taking place. There had been one bungled attempt in San Francisco—that was what had led Rideout to hire Carpenter and Quincannon, Professional Detective Services—and he was certain there would be another tonight. The one lead he and Sabina had uncovered had led him to Walnut Grove, and that lead had preceded him here to Burgade's Crossing: Gus Kennett, owner of the *Island Star*, who was rumored to be the man hired as Rideout's assassin.

The ferry trip took less than ten minutes. And five minutes after the barge landed on the south bank, the stage was on its way along the levee road to Isleton—empty now, for Whittle was stopping here, too. The two men, Quincannon carrying his old warbag, the drummer lugging a heavy carpetbag, trudged uphill to the inn without speaking. Inside, a bearded giant who identified himself as Adam Burgade took three dollars from each of them. The fee entitled the weary traveler to a meal and a room.

Burgade had at least two other guests at present. They were in the common room, and an odd pair they were: a young nun, dressed in a black habit, sitting before the glowing potbellied stove; and an old man with a glass eye and a fierce expression, standing with his hands on his hips before Burgade's liquor buffet.

Whittle stood blinking at the nun. Then, jerkily, he tipped his hat and said, "Good afternoon, Sister. Will you take offense if I say I am surprised to find you here?"

"Not at all, sir. I'm surprised myself to be here."

The old man glared with his good eye. "An outrage, that's what I call it. A damned outrage."

Burgade said, "Watch your language, Mr. Dana. I won't tell you again."

"This is no place for a nun," Dana said. "Besides, I'm a veteran—I served with McClellan's Army of the Potomac in the War Between the States. I'm entitled to a drink of whiskey when I have the money to pay for it."

"The buffet is temporarily closed," Burgade explained to Whittle and Quincannon.

"You hear that?" Dana said. "Temporarily closed. Not a drop of good spirits sold while that woman is in the house. And me with a parched throat. It ain't right, I tell you, Burgade. I ain't Catholic. I ain't even religious."

"Well, I am."

The nun seemed embarrassed. "Really, Mr. Burgade, as I said before, you needn't close your buffet on my account. I don't mind others using alcohol in moderation."

"Mr. Dana don't use it in moderation," Burgade said. "It's best this way, Sister Mary."

"Bah," Dana said.

"Mr. Whittle here is a whiskey drummer," Burgade told him. "Maybe he has a bottle in his grip that he'll sell you."

"I would, and gladly," Whittle said, "but I've no samples left. This is my last stop, you see, Mr. Dana—"

"Bah."

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Gus Kennett was rumored to be involved in a variety of felonious activities, including robbery and assault.

Burgade said, "Gus Kennett's store boat is in, tied up at the wharf. He'll have a jug of forty-rod for sale, if you don't mind paying his price."

"I'll pay any price. But can I bring it back here to drink?"

"No. Burgade's Inn is a temporary temperance house."

"Temporary temperance house. Bah." Dana started for the door, stopped abruptly when he passed Quincannon, and turned back to face him, scowling. "Well, looky here. A Johnny Reb."

"Johnny Reb?"

"That's right. Southerner, ain't you?"

"I was born in Baltimore," Quincannon admitted, "but I've lived in California for fifteen years."

"Once a Johnny Reb, always a Johnny Reb. Spot one of you a mile away. Only good Reb's a dead one, you ask me."

"The Civil War has been over for thirty years, Mr. Dana."

"Tell that to my right eye. It's been pining for the left one for more'n thirty years. Damned Reb shot it out at Antietam."

He clumped out and banged the door behind him.

"Don't mind him, gents," Burgade said. "Nor you either, Sister. He's only like that when he's sober and on his way upriver to the doctor. His bark's worse than his bite."

Whittle said, lowering his voice, "We *can* do business, can't we, Mr. Burgade? Even though the inn is a temporary temperance house? I've some fine buys on Kentucky sour mash—"

"In the kitchen, Whittle, in the kitchen."

The two men went through a door next to the buffet. Rich aromas wafted out, reminding Quincannon that he hadn't eaten since a sparse breakfast. No time now, though; he could have supper later. As for the closing of the buffet, it was of no consequence to him. He had given up the use of spirits when he had entered into partnership with Sabina two years ago.

He found his way down a central corridor at the rear, to the room he'd been given. It was not much larger than a cell, windowless, furnished with a narrow bed and a washstand. He stayed there just long enough to deposit his warbag on the mattress and to double-check the loads in the Remington Navy revolver he carried under his coat.

Outside, the wind pushed him along a muddy branch of the levee road toward the wharf. The *Island Star*'s calliope was mercifully silent and the number of customers had dwindled to a handful as dusk approached. The little steamer was old and weatherbeaten, her brasswork greening from lack of polish, her short foredeck cluttered with crates and barrels. She was one of a handful of store boats that prowled the fifteen hundred square miles of sloughs and islands between Sacramento and Stockton, peddling everything from candy to kerosene to shantyboaters, small farmers, field hands, and other delta denizens.

Gus Kennett had more profitable sidelines, however. He bought and sold stolen goods, a crime for which he had been arrested twice and convicted once, and was rumored to be involved in a variety of other felonious activities, including robbery and assault. Murder, too, if what Quincannon had heard rumored was true.

As he drew abreast of the gangplank, the old man, Dana, came hurrying out of the lamplit cargo hold, clutching a bottle of forty-rod whiskey. Dana glared at him in passing, muttered something, and scooted off to find a place to do his solitary drinking. He was evidently the last of Kennett's customers. No one was visible in the hold and the decks were deserted except for a deckhand who lounged near the rusty calliope.

Quincannon sauntered across the plank, entered the hold. It had been outfitted as a store, with cabinets fastened around the bulkheads, a long counter at one end, and every inch of deck space crammed with a welter of sacks, bins, barrels, boxes, tools, and other loose goods. Gus Kennett was perched on a stool behind the counter, a short-six cigar clamped between yellow horse teeth. He was a barrel of a man, Kennett—no, a powder keg of a man—with short, stubby arms and legs; a small head; and a huge, powerful torso.

"Afternoon," Kennett said around the stump of his cigar. "Help you with something, friend?"

"A plug of cable twist, if you have it."

"Don't. Never had a call for it."

"What kind of pipe tobacco do you sell?"

"Virginia plug cut and Durham loose."

"The plug cut, then."

Kennett produced a sack of

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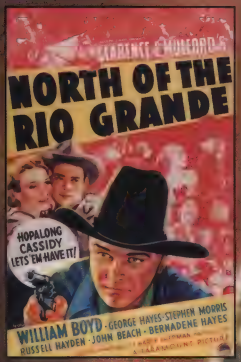
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Quincannon was uneasy as he left the Island Star. There was nothing aboard the store boat to suggest how the murder would be committed.

cheap tobacco and named a price that was half again what it would cost even in Walnut Grove. Quincannon paid without protest or comment.

"Don't believe I've seen you in Burgade's Crossing before," Kennett said. "Big gent like you, nice dressed, I wouldn't forget."

"I've never been here before."

"Passing through?"

"On business."

"What kind of business?"

"Patent medicines," Quincannon said. "Dr. Wallmann's Nerve and Brain Salts, guaranteed to cure more afflictions and derangements than any other product made. I don't suppose I might interest you in a bottle?"

Kennett laughed. "Do I look like I need nerve and brain salts?"

"No, sir, you don't. But some of your customers might."

"Got my own supplier for patent medicines."

Quincannon feigned a sigh. "Little enough business for me here, it seems. Or anywhere in these backwaters. I believe I'll catch the next steamer for Sacramento. There is one due tonight, isn't there?"

"I couldn't say, friend. Ask Adam Burgade."

"I'll do that. Doesn't appear to be much business for you here, either, if I may say so."

"Never is in Burgade's Crossing."

"So you'll be moving on soon yourself?"

"That I will," Kennett said. "Was there anything else, friend?"

Quincannon had taken the conversation to its limit; if he tried to prolong it, he would succeed only in making the store boat owner suspicious. He said, "No, friend, nothing," and took his leave.

He was uneasy again as he left the *Island Star*. How was Kennett planning to commit murder tonight? There had been nothing aboard the store boat and nothing in Kennett's manner to provide a clue. A distant rifle shot through rain-soaked darkness was pure folly. A pistol shot or knife thrust at close quarters were more certain methods, but Noah Rideout would not be alone when he left the *Yosemite* and the odds were short that an assassin would be identified or killed himself before he could escape. No, Gus Kennett would not risk his own neck, no matter how much he was being paid. He was sly and slippery, not bold.

Would he enlist the help of others? His deckhand, perhaps? That was another troubling thought.

As was the question of who had hired him and why.

Noah Rideout was a man of many enemies. A hard man, uncompromising in his business dealings and personal life. In his fifty-seven years he had had two wives, several mistresses, and three sons, all of whom, by his own free admission, hated him enough to want him dead. He owned much of the rich Tyler Island croplands; he had forced several small farmers to sell their land to him at low prices, and earned the hatred of others by his tireless and expensive campaign to build more levee roads as a means of flood control. And he had been a leader in the legal battle against hydraulic gold mining in the Mother Lode, the dumping of billions of cubic yards of yellow slickens that had clogged rivers and sloughs and destroyed farmland. The California Debris Commission Act, passed two years before in 1893, had made the discharge of debris into the rivers illegal and virtually put the hydraulickers known as the Little Giants out of business.

Rideout himself had been unable to narrow down the field, although it was his opinion that "one of the damned hydraulickers" was behind the murder plot. His battle with them had been long and bitter, involving bribery and intimidation of witnesses on the part of the miners, and he felt that some were not above mayhem as a means of revenge. But neither Quincannon nor Sabina had been able to find a link between Gus Kennett and one of the Little Giants, or any other evidence to support Rideout's contention.

Restlessly Quincannon prowled through the meager town, but there was nothing there to enlighten him. Full dark had closed down when he started back to the inn. The wind had sharpened and the first drops of rain iced his skin. The clouds were low-hanging now, so low that the tops of some of the taller trees in the swamp were obscured by their drift.

Diagonally across the road from the inn was a barnlike building that he took to be the livery. One of the doors was open and a buttery lampglow shone within. The light drew him. Inside he discovered four horses in stalls, an expensive Concord buggy, and the hostler asleep in the harness room.

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Quincannon stood shivering under the lean-to, his hand still resting on the butt of his revolver, alternately watching the river and the road down from the inn.

He had a look at the buggy. He thought it might belong to Noah Rideout, and gold monogrammed letters on its body—NJR—confirmed it. Could Kennett's plan have something to do with the rig? Or with the livery barn? Not the rig; Quincannon checked the wheels and hubs, the axletrees, the transverse springs, even the calash folding top and under the wide leather seat, and found nothing out of order. The barn, though, was an excellent place for an ambush. He would have to keep that in mind.

The rain was gathering momentum as he came out of the livery. Thunder rumbled faintly; so did his empty stomach. He hurried across to the inn.

Sister Mary had the common room to herself. She was still sitting before the stove, working now with cloth and thread on a sampler. He nodded to her and sat down at the long puncheon table.

She asked, "Has it begun to storm?"

"It has."

"I thought I heard thunder. Will it rain heavily tonight, do you think?"

"From all indications. Are you waiting for the midnight packet, Sister?"

"No, I'm going downriver. I'll be leaving in the morning."

"It's unusual for a nun to travel alone, isn't it?"

"Yes. My brother in Isleton is ill."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Seriously ill?"

She nodded gravely. "I am afraid so."

A Chinese waitress entered and Quincannon asked for supper. It turned out to be a plate of fried catfish, potatoes, corn, and a cup of bitter coffee. He wolfed it all down and requested another helping, after which he found room for a slab of peach pie. His appetite had always been prodigious. He had inherited all of his father's lusty appetites, in fact, along with his genteel southern mother's love for cultural pursuits.

Sabina had once remarked that he was a curious mixture of the gentle and the stone-hard, the sensitive and the unyielding. He supposed that was an accurate assessment. And the reason, perhaps, that he was a better detective than Thomas L. Quincannon, the rival of Pinkerton in the nation's capital during the Civil War. He knew his limitations, his weaknesses. His father had never once admitted to being wrong, considered himself invincible—and had been shot to death while on a fool's errand on the Baltimore docks. John Frederick Quincannon intended to die in bed at the age of ninety. And not alone, either.

In his room, he lit his pipe and tried to read one of the books of poetry he habitually took along for relaxation on field investigations. But he was too keyed up to relax tonight. And the verses by Whitman and Wordsworth made him yearn for Sabina. It was a sad but true fact that she had become more than a business partner to him. He had made numerous advances to her that were only partly of a lustful nature; she had rejected each gently but firmly. "We work splendidly together, John," she'd said. "If we were to become lovers, or more, it might damage our professional relationship."

He didn't agree with this, and he was ever willing to put the matter to the test. There were times when he felt that she cared deeply for him and that she was weakening; at other times he was convinced she would never weaken. It made his life difficult, and at the same time highly stimulating.

After a while the restlessness drove him back to the common room. Sister Mary had retired and there was still no sign of old man Dana. He watched Whittle and Burgade play chess. Burgade was surprisingly good at the game; the whiskey drummer made a poor opponent. Eventually Whittle wearied of losing and went to his room, and Quincannon took his place at the board.

He played an excellent game himself in normal circumstances, but his mind kept slipping away to Gus Kennett and Noah Rideout's imminent arrival. Burgade won three matches and they played a fourth to a draw. Outside, rain hammered on the inn's roof and the wind moaned and chattered ceaselessly. A foul night. And a foul deed no doubt planned for it.

But a deed that would not be done. No, by Godfrey, not with a fee balance of one thousand dollars yet to be collected from Mr. Rideout.

It was just eleven thirty by his stemwinder when he left the inn. Burgade registered surprise at his departure, and to forestall questions, Quincannon explained that he was meeting an acquaintance

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Quincannon tensed, drawing back against a shelter wall, as a slicker clad figure emerged from the inn.

on the *Yosemite* and felt the need of some fresh air before the packet arrived. A bit lame, but Burgade accepted it without comment.

In the wet darkness he pulled the brim of his hat down and the collar of his slicker up to keep water out of his eyes and off his neck. Visibility was no more than a few yards. He could barely make out the daubs of lantern light that marked the ferryman's shack and steamboat landing. Wind gusts constantly changed the slant of the rain so that it was like a jiggling curtain against the night's black wall.

Shoulders hunched and body bowed, he set off along the muddy road toward town. The surface was still solid along the edges, but if the rain continued to whack down with such intensity, by morning this track and the levee road would be quagmires.

Faint scattered lights materialized as he neared the town buildings, but none shone at the wharf. At first he thought the *Island Star* had slipped out of Dead Man's Slough under cover of the storm. But no, she was still moored there, the bumpers roped to her strakes thumping against the pilings as the rough waters rolled her from side to side. All dark as she was, she looked like a ghost boat. There was no sign of Gus Kennett or his deckhand. No sign of anyone in the vicinity.

Quincannon heeled around, started back toward the inn. He had gone only a few yards when a lull between gusts brought a sound to his ears. It was faint and far-off, an odd hollow chunking. He paused, straining to hear over the storm's wailings and moanings. There it was again . . . and again. It seemed to be coming from on or across the slough, but he couldn't be certain. He waited to hear it another time—and heard only the wind, the harsh slap and gurgle of the water as it punished the bank below.

He plowed ahead, bypassing the inn and then the ferryman's shack. The steamer landing, he saw as he approached it, was deserted. He veered off to check behind the landing's rickety lean-to shelter, to peer among the willows and cottonwoods that leaned over the river nearby. He startled a bird of some sort, a snipe or a plover, and sent it whickering off through the swamp growth. Nothing else moved there except the storm.

He stood shivering under the lean-to, his hand still resting on the butt of his revolver, alternately watching the river and the road down from the inn. It wasn't long before he heard the first shrill blast of the *Yosemite*'s whistle: she was on schedule despite the foul weather. Less than a minute later her three tiers of blurred lights appeared; and at almost the same instant lampglow spilled out through the front door of the inn and a slicker-clad figure emerged. Quincannon tensed, drawing back against the shelter wall.

The figure came down to the landing, not hurrying, tacking unsteadily through the mud and rain. Whittle? No, it was the old man with the glass eye, Dana. He didn't see Quincannon until he was almost upon him. And when he did, he started so violently that he came close to losing his balance and toppling into the river.

"Hellfire!" he shouted when he recovered. He leaned close to peer at Quincannon's face, breathing whiskey fumes at him. "Is that you, you damn Johnny Reb? What're you lurking here for?"

"I'm not lurking, I'm waiting for the *Yosemite*."

"Sacramento bound, eh?"

"No. Meeting someone."

"Another Copperhead, no doubt. Say, you got relatives fought at Antietam?"

"No."

"Reb that shot my eye out looked just like you."

Dana belched, moved off to stand at the far side of the shelter. He watched the *Yosemite*'s approach with his good eye and Quincannon watched him.

The packet's captain was experienced at landing in the midst of a squall. He brought the *Yosemite* in straight to the landing, her whistle shrieking fitfully, and held her there with her stern buckets lashing the river while a team of deckhands slung out a gangplank. As soon as the plank was down, two men wearing slickers and toting carpetbags hurried off. After which Dana, with a one-eyed glare at Quincannon and a muttered, "Damn all Johnny Rebs," staggered on board. The deckhands hauled in the plank and the steamboat swung out toward midchannel again. The entire operation had taken no more than a minute.

When Quincannon recognized Noah Rideout as one of the disembarkees, he stepped forward and identified himself. Rideout peered up at him; he was half a head shorter and had a habit of standing with his feet spread wide, a

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The barge lurched, made a dancing sideslip that almost tore loose Quincannon's grip on the buggy wheel.

pose that was both belligerent and challenging. He reminded Quincannon of a fighting cock.

"What are you doing here?" Rideout demanded.

Quincannon told him in brief, clipped sentences. Rideout was neither concerned nor impressed.

"Well, let this man Kennett come ahead with his dirty work. I am armed and so is Leland. So are you, I trust. That makes three guns against one."

"Kennett may not be planning to use guns. And he may have help, for all we know."

"What sort of ambush could he be planning, then?"

"I haven't a clear idea. The man is shrewd and unpredictable. I suggest we get inside as quickly—"

"Inside? Inside where?"

"The inn, of course."

"That rathole," Rideout said contemptuously. "I wouldn't spend five minutes in Adam Burgade's house."

"It's the only place here to stay the night."

"I am not staying in Burgade's Crossing. I'll sleep in my own bed."

Quincannon stared at him. "You mean you're thinking of traveling home in this weather?"

"Not thinking of it," Rideout said, "about to do it."

"Sir, I strongly advise—"

"I don't care what you advise. Why should I stay here, if this is where some blackguard plans to assassinate me?"

"He could just as easily make the attempt on the road, with the rain and dark to conceal him. It would be safer at the inn."

"Damn the inn. If this rain keeps up, the levee road will be impassable tomorrow. I refuse to stay in Burgade's Crossing one night, let alone two, when I can be home in three hours." He turned to Leland Stannard, a dark, heavyset man who sported mutton-chop whiskers. "Enough of this shilly-shallying. Leland, go up to the livery barn and fetch the buggy and team."

"Right away, Mr. Rideout." Stannard started off.

"Quincannon, you go with him, give him a hand."

"No, sir, I'm staying with you."

"I don't need a bodyguard."

"You hired my firm to prevent your death and that is exactly what I intend to do. If it means accompanying you to your home tonight, then there will be three in your buggy, not two."

"Stubborn, aren't you?"

"No more than you, sir."

Rideout seemed to want further argument, but changed his mind when the wind gusted sharply, pelting him with stinging rain. He shouted, "Have it your way," and stomped off toward the ferryman's shack.

Quincannon followed, grumbling to himself. He would have to leave his warbag at the inn; Rideout wouldn't go with him to pick it up, and he wouldn't let the farmer out of his sight for a minute until they reached his Tyler Island farm. A charge for the inconvenience would be added to Rideout's bill.

The burly ferryman did not take kindly to being wakened from a sound sleep, and even less kindly to a crossing on such a night as this. It was dangerous, he said; the wind was a she-devil, the current was flood-fast—

Rideout cut him off with a curt word and a gold coin that flashed in the light from the ferryman's bug-eye lantern. There were no more protestations. The ferryman had the landing apron down and was making ready with the windlass when Stannard drove the Concord buggy down the embankment.

The two horses were skittish; it took all four men to coax them onto the rocking barge. Stannard set the brake and then swung down to help Rideout hold the animals while the ferryman hooked the guard chain, cast off the mooring ropes, and bent to his windlass. Quincannon braced himself against the buggy's off rear wheel, scanning as much of the shore and slough as he could make out through the downpour. He thought he saw someone up on the road near the inn, a shape like a huge-winged vulture, but he couldn't be sure. If they *were* being watched, whoever it was stood still as a statue.

Progress was slow, the barge rolling and pitching on the turbulent water. They were less than halfway across when Quincannon heard a moaning in the storm's racket—a split of wind on the ferry cable, he thought, or the strain on the scow produced by the load and the strong current. Then all of a sudden the barge lurched, made a dancing little sideslip that almost tore loose Quincannon's grip on the buggy wheel.

The ferryman shouted a warning that the wind shredded away. In the next instant there was a loud snapping noise and something came hurtling through the wet blackness, cracking like a

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M218

Rideout clawed desperately to free himself from Quincannon, to cling to the side rail of the tilting deck.

whip. One of the cables, broken free of its anchor on the north bank.

Swirling water bit into the scow, drenched Quincannon to the knees as it sluiced up across the deck. The ferryman was thrown backward from the windlass; the drum spun free, ratcheting. He shouted again. So did Rideout, who was clinging to the horse on Quincannon's side. The barge, floating loose now and caught by the current, heaved and bucked toward the dark sweep of the river.

The terror-stricken horses reared, and a hoof must have struck Stannard; he screamed in pain and was gone into the roiling slough. Quincannon felt the deck canting over, the buggy beginning to tip and slide away from him. He lunged toward Rideout, caught hold of his arm. In another few seconds the buggy would roll, and the weight of it and the horses tumbling would capsize the scow. There was nothing to be done but to go into the water themselves, try to swim clear while they were still in the slough.

The ferryman knew it, too. He yelled a third time—"Jump, jump!"—and dived over the guard chain. But Rideout fought against going overboard. He clawed desperately to free himself, to cling to the side rail, all the while shouting, "I can't swim! I can't swim!"

Quincannon was bigger and stronger, and there was no time left for such concerns. He wrenched the little farmer around, locked an arm about his waist, and jumped both of them off the tilting deck.

Rideout's struggles grew frenzied as the chill water closed over them. Quincannon nearly lost his grip on the man's slicker, managed to hold on and to kick them both up to the surface. Rideout continued to flail and sputter in panic, which left Quincannon no choice in this matter either. He rapped the farmer smartly on the chin with a closed fist, a blow that put an abrupt end to the scuffling.

The current had them by then, but it was not half as powerful here as it would be in the river. Quincannon shucked one arm out of his slicker, shifted his grasp on Rideout, and then worked the other arm free; without the dragging oilskins, he could move more easily in the water. It took him a few seconds to get his bearings, to pick out the faint light on the ferryman's shack. Then, towing the unconscious man, he struck out toward the bank.

The wind and the current battled him at every stroke, bobbing the pair of them like corks. Once an eddy almost took Rideout away from him. His right leg threatened to cramp; the cold and exertion numbed his mind as well as his body. The bank, the light, seemed far away . . . then a little closer . . . and closer still . . .

It might have been five minutes or fifteen before his outstretched arm finally touched the shore mud. He got his feet down, managed to drag himself and his burden up through the silt. Lay there in the pounding rain waiting for his breath and his strength to return.

Shouts penetrated the storm, roused him. He sat up weakly. At his side Rideout lay unmoving. Three men were sloshing toward them along the edge of the embankment, Adam Burgade in the lead. Behind him were the burly ferryman and the drummer, Whittle.

When Burgade helped him to his feet, Quincannon said, "Look after Rideout. I'm all right."

Burgade squatted to examine the farmer. "He's alive but he's swallowed a quart or two. I'll get it out of him." He rolled Rideout onto his stomach, straddled him, and began forcing the water out of his lungs.

Quincannon turned to the ferryman, who was sodden but appeared none the worse for his own hard swim. "The other man on the barge—Stannard?"

"Drowned, looks like. There's no sign of him."

So Gus Kennett would stand trial for murder after all.

Whittle asked, "What happened out there?"

"Cable snapped," the ferryman said. "Don't know how—'twas new enough, and strong the last I checked it."

Quincannon knew how. Even the strongest cable could not withstand the blade of an ax. The odd, hollow chunking he'd heard earlier had been ax blows. Kennett must have known of Rideout's stubborn refusal to spend a night at Burgade's Inn, that he would put his buggy on the ferry barge even in a squall; and he must have rowed a skiff over to the spit anchor and cut most of the way through the cable, leaving just enough for the ferry to be winched out into midstream before it snapped. A diabolical plan. Kennett might have killed four men

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Sister Mary was waiting anxiously inside. She clasped her hands at the damp front of her habit. "Is he dead?" she asked.

for the price of one, and evidently without qualms.

He said nothing of this now; there would be time enough later for explanations. He watched the innkeeper finish emptying Rideout, stand and hoist the limp form into his giant's arms.

"He'll live," Burgade said, "if pneumonia don't set in."

"Same might be said for all of us."

Quincannon was still shaky-legged; the ferryman had to lend an arm as they trudged back along the bank, up the steep incline to the road. He was able to walk then under his own power. The ferryman veered away to his shack for dry clothing; the rest of them slogged to the inn.

Sister Mary was waiting anxiously inside. She clasped her hands at the damp front of her habit when she saw Rideout cradled in Burgade's arms. "Is he dead?"

"No, Sister. But he come pretty close."

"Do you think he'll live?"

"Chances are. Say a prayer for him."

Burgade carried the farmer into one of the rear rooms. Quincannon followed, helped strip off Rideout's soggy clothing and get him into bed.

"Hot coffee," he said then, "and plenty of it."

"Whiskey's better for taking off a chill. This is no longer a temperance house, nun or no nun."

"Just coffee for me," Quincannon said, and went out and down the hall to the room he'd occupied earlier. His warbag was still on the bed. A good thing, after all, that he hadn't been able to come back for it before boarding the ferry. He shucked out of his own soggy clothing, noticed then, for the first time, that he'd lost his Remington Navy in the slough. Rideout would pay for a replacement, he thought darkly, and no argument. New clothing and a new slicker, too.

He rubbed himself dry, dressed, and returned to the common room. Burgade and Whittle were alone there, sitting at the puncheon table with steaming mugs of coffee in front of them. A third cup waited for Quincannon.

"You sure you don't want a shot of Whittle's rotgut to go with it?" Burgade asked him.

"Rotgut?" Whittle was offended. "Mr. Burgade, you know very well—"

Quincannon cut him off. "Where's Sister Mary?"

"Gone to minister to Rideout," Burgade said. "She said she—hey! What's got into you?"

Quincannon had turned and was running back along the corridor. He yanked open the door to Rideout's room—and just in the nick of time. The woman in the black habit was bending over the bed, a pillow clasped tightly in both hands and pressed down over Rideout's face. The farmer was conscious enough to grapple with her, but too feebly to save himself.

Quincannon rushed in, tore the pillow from her grasp, and flung it aside. She clawed at him, cursing, then tried to ruin him with her knee. He put an end to this lethal behavior by swinging her around and bear-hugging her from behind, pinning her against his body.

"Here, what do you think you're doing?" Whittle said from the doorway. His tone was outraged. "How dare you treat a nun that way!"

"She isn't a nun. Listen to what she's saying, drummer. No nun ever used such language as that."

The woman continued to curse and struggle, trying now to backkick Quincannon's shins; he sidestepped nimbly. Her hood had come askew and strands of bright hennaed hair poked free.

Rideout pushed up onto one elbow, staring at her in dull-witted confusion. "Melissa?" he said.

"You know her, eh? I thought so. Who is she?"

"Melissa Pelletier. She—I knew her in Sacramento last year."

"Knew me?" the woman shouted. "You promised to marry me, damn you. Instead you left me to die with scarlet fever."

"Scarlet fever? I never knew you were ill . . ."

"Nearly a year before I recovered. A year! I swore I'd make you pay dearly and I would have if Gus Kennett wasn't a blundering fool. And if this"—she called Quincannon a colorful name—"hadn't stopped me just now."

Quincannon was remembering the tune the *Island Star*'s calliope had played over and over today: "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Coincidence? Perhaps, but he didn't think so. Melissa Pelletier had likely paid Kennett for that bit of satisfaction, too.

Burgade had pushed past Whittle. "What in blazes is this all about?" he demanded of Quincannon. "And what does Gus Kennett have to do with it?"

"Help me put this, ah, lady where she can't do any more harm and I'll explain."

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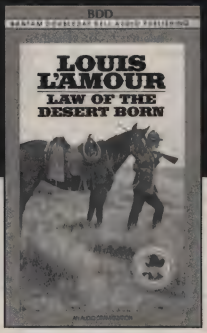

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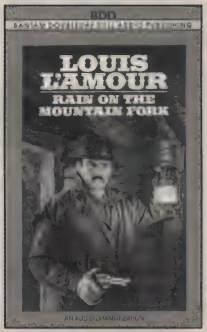

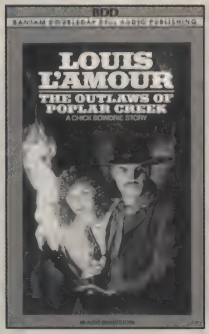

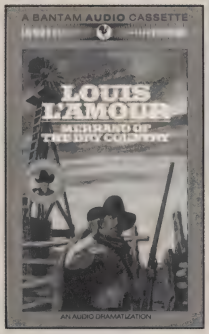

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Together they locked Melissa Pelletier in one of the other rooms. Then they returned to Rideout's room, where the farmer was now sitting up in bed with a mug of coffee in one hand. With the other he gingerly rubbed a large bruise on his chin.

"I'll thank you for saving my life," he said to Quincannon, "not once but twice tonight. But dammit, man, was it necessary to crack my jaw?"

Not only necessary, Quincannon thought, *but a pleasure.*

He proceeded to tell his tale to Burgade and Whittle. The innkeeper took an angry view of such goings-on in his town; he was all for rushing down to the *Island Star* with rifle and pistol and either shooting Gus Kennett or placing him under citizen's arrest. Quincannon dissuaded him. He had neither the desire nor the stamina for any more heroics tonight. Even if Kennett realized he had been found out and managed to slip away in his boat, he would not get far. The sheriff of Walnut Grove and the law elsewhere in the delta would see to that.

"You seemed to know Sister Mary wasn't Sister Mary," Whittle said. "What made you suspect her?"

It had been more than one thing. She had told him her brother was seriously ill in Isleton and she was bound there to visit him; yet she had remained in Burgade's Crossing to wait for passage on tomorrow morning's downriver packet, rather than taking the stage from Walnut Grove that had brought him and Whittle here this afternoon. Then there was the figure he'd seen watching the ferry as he and Rideout boarded it. It had resembled a huge-winged vulture, the very shape a woman dressed in black robes with a slicker held fanned out over her head would make. He had known she'd been outside, too, because of the dampness of her habit. And there was no reason for her to have stood watching in the rain unless she knew what was about to happen and wanted to see it done.

Quincannon did not articulate any of this. Nor would he to anyone but Sabina, who would properly appreciate such clever deductions—and, he very much hoped, properly reward him. Instead he smiled an enigmatic smile.

"Detective work, gentlemen," he said. "That is all I can say. A man in my profession must never reveal his secrets." ✠

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MISS SHOSHONE

If these were the old days, I would tell you who my people are, the Shoshone people who have been on this particular land for centuries. I'd give you the names of my grandparents and my parents. I would say what I've done in my life, including what I did in the war—all a way of letting you know who's telling this story, of counting coups.

Maybe one day soon I'll feel enough old-time power to start a story that way. For now I'll begin with the first time I saw Loo.

Dad picked him up hitchhiking. He wouldn't have given him a ride, except Dad thought he was one of ours.

Loo had a chip on his shoulder the size of a wagon, you could see that. There was also something different about him, which Dad would have

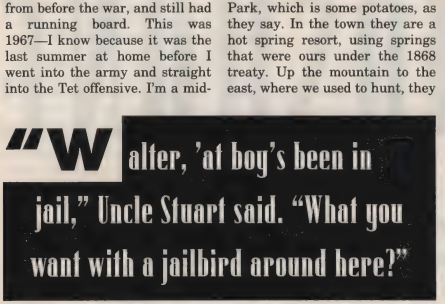
BY

WIN BLEVINS

noticed if he hadn't been seeing just another Navajo.

Dad asked him just one question, talking past my face toward the window of the truck. "You a Begay?"

Loo nodded yes and climbed up next to me on the bench seat of the pickup. I say climbed up because Dad's pickup in those days was from before the war, and still had a running board. This was 1967—I know because it was the last summer at home before I went into the army and straight into the Tet offensive. I'm a mid-



dle-aged schoolteacher with one gimpy leg, but then I was fit to be a soldier, so said the greetings from the President of the United States.

Anyway, Dad was heading down Bucks Lane toward our place and saw Loo and brought him home. The joke was on Dad because he wasn't one of our Navajos. Being named Begay, if you're a Navajo, is like being named Smith for a white man, or Wyeth or Bows if you're a Shoshone.

This won't make any sense to you white folks, so I have to explain it. Here on the Fort Wyeth Reservation we are Shoshones. Lots of us are named after the fort, and others after Chief Bucks, whose name was actually Three Bucks Dancing. The big white man town nearby—Bucks, Idaho—is also named after him. My own name is Arnie Bucks. We've been here since they made this reservation in 1868. There's no reason you should know any of this, since even our own kids don't know who we are or where we came from, much as I try to tell them.

We are in between worlds here. Just a little to the south they are "Famous Potatoes." To the northeast is Yellowstone National Park, which is some potatoes, as they say. In the town they are a hot spring resort, using springs that were ours under the 1868 treaty. Up the mountain to the east, where we used to hunt, they have a ski area. The Tibos notice us, though, only when they drive by the sign FORT WYETH RESERVATION on the highway.

By the way, our Shoshone word for white man is *Tibo,* which sounds like "my bow." We think Tibos are funny—funny peculiar and funny ha-ha. I'll tell you about it some time.

Our Bucks family was not raising potatoes, we were a shirttail cow outfit, and right then, late July, we needed to buck hay. Idaho has long winters. When haying season came, we needed all the hands we could get. Dad hired Mexicans and Navajos mostly, families that followed the harvest for the summer and headed south for the winter, and they were good help.

Nowadays the ranchers all do the work with big combines and don't need hands. The Bucks family ranch is even leased out to a white man, and he hires whoever he wants, preferably not Shoshones, not Navajos, not even Toya Tibos (what we call Mexicans), just white folks.

Right away, coming up the long drive, Loo says, "Anybody bunking there?" and points to the old Buick that was rusted out and sitting by the irrigation ditch.

Dad just says no.

"Mind if I do?" says Loo. It turned out later this was more than he talked in most weeks. "I'll help buck hay."

"Ain't you a Begay?" says Dad. Meaning one of our Navajos living in the gandy dancer car up toward the house, right then cooking supper over a fire.

"I'm Navajo but not a Begay," says Loo.

Dad looked at Loo for a while like Loo had suckered him. I think then was when Dad noticed what was different about Loo, though he never said so. "You ever buck hay?" says Dad.

"I can do anything," says Loo. Navajos have a soft way of talking, almost like girls, but you could hear Loo had some kind of strong feeling about saying he could do anything.

"I'm Walter Bucks," Dad said. "This here's my boy Arnie." I offered him my hand, and he brushed it the way Navajos do and call a handshake. He didn't say his name. "It's fifteen dollars a day. Mom'll be down before long with something to eat." This even though supper was over.

"I already ate," Loo said, and jumped out of the truck and headed for the old Buick. From the look of him, he hadn't eaten in a week.

Then it struck me why Dad hadn't known he was on the road. He wasn't carrying any belongings, any at all. Because he didn't own anything to put in a suitcase.

"You think he knows how to buck hay?" I asked Dad.

Dad blew the breath out

through his nose a little. "Some do," he said, "but Navajo country's desert. They couldn't bale a pickup load off the whole reservation." Dad looked after Loo thoughtfully.

"He's not in Navajo country," I said.

"Yeah. Where he's been, he ain't been haying. But he can help Stuart rake."

Uncle Stuart gave him the name Loo right off. Said he looked just like Uncle Stuart's lieutenant in the war. That was World War II, and that lieutenant was a Mexican, not a Navajo, but they were all the same to him, and damned if they didn't even walk just alike. So Uncle Stuart called him Loo.

Then Uncle Stuart noticed something beyond the resemblance, saw it right there in the first light when we were about to get started, and said in his loud way, "Walter, 'at boy's been in jail. What you want with a jailbird around here?" Loo heard, and from the color of his face I was glad he didn't have anything in his hand to hit Uncle Stuart with. When he darkened, I saw that jailhouse pallor, which is unhealthy-looking.

The Begays came up to him and they all traded a bunch of words in Navajo. He told me later they were talking about what clan they are—"born to" and "born for" and stuff like that. Loo didn't say, but it must have been different clans because after that, the Navajos didn't take much interest in him, father nor mother nor any of them. They were the same Navajos who helped us every summer and always lived in that gandy dancer car Dad pulled over onto the place when the railroad junked it.

Dad sent Loo out with Uncle Stuart to learn to rake, which made sense. My left ankle was fresh broke and sore as could be. I usually helped Uncle Stuart rake. The Navajos and Mexicans were good stacking crews and knew how to work together.

But for Loo, working for Uncle Stuart was cruel and unusual punishment. You see, Uncle Stuart didn't like Navajos. Or Mexicans. Or anybody but his own family, really. You may think it strange that one Injun would be prejudiced against another, but that's the way it was in those days. We Shoshones didn't even like each other. The mixed-bloods, like my family, mostly descendants of the fur traders who worked out of Fort Wyeth in the old times, figured we were more progressive than the full-bloods. The way we saw it, we were farmers and ranchers and they weren't much of anything. The full-bloods on their side looked down on us because we weren't full Injun.

I remember back then a full-blood boy married a mixed-blood girl and pretty soon they got killed in their pickup. After they were buried, the girl's mother had her dug right out of the grave next to her husband and put her body over in our Episcopalian cemetery.

Anyway, Uncle Stuart was an old-timer, even more old-time than my Dad in the way of his thoughts and feelings. One result of that was that he believed in old things the rest of us didn't. Another was that he still halfway thought other tribes were enemies.

I told Dad I'd go along with Loo and Uncle Stuart. With my ankle broken, I was no good for haying anyway. Dad nodded yes. He probably figured I meant to show Loo a little, but what I wanted was to protect him from Stuart's mouth.

I've got to admit I also thought I might make a friend. There weren't many fellows my age to talk to. That summer they were all gone off to Vietnam, meaning to count coup on the yellow foe. And I don't know why, I was curious about Loo.

Uncle Stuart was easy on machines but hard on people. Dad was the number one mower and Uncle Stuart the number one raker. He sure had a nice touch with that rake, got it laid out in the windrows just so, and he was hell for keeping going, getting it done pronto.

He started chewing on Loo right off. Loo was to keep his mouth shut and listen, Uncle Stuart couldn't stand yakking. Loo was to do what he was told or get out of the pasture. If Uncle Stuart said jump, Loo was to ask how high.

That summer, the fellows my age were all gone off to Vietnam, meaning to count coup on the yellow foe.

I didn't say a word and kind of looked at Loo sideways like saying, Don't pay any attention, and don't talk back 'cause it won't do any good. I smiled to let him know it wasn't going to be as bad as it sounded.

He was still carrying that chip, though, just sat there and stared straight ahead, as much as to say, Go right ahead, I never expected

to be treated decent, being a jailbird and a Navajo and you can't stand either one.

Loo stared straight ahead, sulky-like, while Uncle Stuart showed him how to lift the rake with his foot and set it back down. It's an easy job, but you need a touch, and you have to pay attention. Too short down and you have too small a bundle. Too long down and your bundle will be too big and won't dry.

Drying is the whole point. You rake it to get as much as you can to the sun and wind. If it's hot with a little breeze, in an hour or so the top will be dry. You can tell because it's crackly when you walk on it. Then you pass through again and turn the green stuff underneath to the weather.

With hay you have to stay at it and move fast because you can't stack it wet. If you do, it'll burn. If it rains, you have to start all over again. So you try to get as much dry as you can, fast. It's going to rain sometime, even here, and you want to get as much as possible done before that happens.

We had eighty acres of hay, and if you did it over and over on account of rain, it was a job to buck.

I rode along beside Loo, hanging on, which was hard with just one leg. I didn't say much but nodded to him or gave him a look to tell him up or down. He didn't take to that and acted like I wasn't there. Every time he made a bundle too big or little, Uncle Stuart yelled at him. It was going to be a long day, maybe a long week, and I wasn't making any friend.

When everyone else went up to the house to eat, Loo began to look at me funny. Uncle Stuart just made his turn at the end of the row and kept raking, like nothing was going on. Meanwhile, Dad and all the stackers were going in the house, getting out of the sun, and getting some cool water.

Loo looked hot and dry and irritable, and I was thinking he hadn't eaten for no telling how long. But Uncle Stuart was determined to outwork everybody else, so there would be no sense going against him. He always made several passes after everyone else knocked off for lunch, and kept on half an hour after the others at night, making us put the rake away in the dark. Uncle Stuart was hell for putting up hay, and hell on Navajos.

The biggest deal of Festival Days is the selection of Miss Shoshone, which is like the Tibo people's Miss America.

None of the trouble would have happened except for the perversity of my sister Berdina. She and the other women cooked all day for us, a big lunch and a big dinner, and Berdina didn't sit down with the hands but kept right at it.

She must have seen Loo from a distance, though, and Berdina always liked to play games. I ought to tell you my sister is one of the best-looking women you ever saw, and in those days she could play any game she wanted with men. She was seventeen and up for Miss Shoshone, our tribal beauty queen. So this time she sat at the table and joked with everyone just like she cared.

In fact, all that existed for Berdina that summer was her teenage girlfriends and Scott Williams. He was a Tibo kid, a town kid, and he was courting Berdina, in his fashion. He was a wild kid, ran up and down the country roads at crazy speeds in his fancy Mustang convertible, and drank a lot of beer—I mean a lot. When he came for Berdina, he just drove up and honked, and she ran out. She wouldn't come back until sunup, sometimes. Him being white would have been fine with the family, but not being disrespectful and wild. So the only one of us who could tolerate Scott Williams was Berdina. And we couldn't stop her.

When we rakers finally came up to the house that first day, everyone else was having a last drink and last moment out of the sun, and Berdina was still at the table, talking in an excited way and flashing her teeth and eyes, and generally carrying on in front of a good-looking stranger.

Loo fell like he'd been thrown out of a tree. And acted like he'd hit the ground so hard he'd lost his sense.

Berdina liked that.

They didn't say much to each other, mostly because Loo was struck speechless, but Berdina would smile at him when she made a witty remark to someone else, and bring him second helpings, and all such. Outside she teased him by dribbling a little water from the enameled dipper onto his black hair, and laughing and running off. Loo put on the dumbest grin you ever did see—the first time I remember seeing him smile.

How they did it I'll never know

because I was there at lunchtime and never saw them talk privately; we worked while there was light, which was more than twelve hours a day; and Loo never came up to the house at night. Somehow, though, Berdina told Loo she would go with him to the big night of Festival Days. Which meant him and not Scott Williams, but Loo didn't know that. And there wasn't a chance in hell she would stick to her promise.

Festival Days is our big deal of the year. It was new then and wasn't as big as now—we didn't have an arena but just used the baseball diamond, and had a hay wagon for a stage, and there was no powwow like these days, just some dancing and contests. But it was important to us. In fact, Festival Days was one of the ways we got to remembering again that we are Indians, Shoshones—that we have a past to revere and traditions to honor and old ways to guide us. At least that's what I tell my students at the high school. Some of them get their minds out from between their legs long enough to hear me.

It was Festival Days that got us back to that. Until then everyone camped in wall tents. No one even owned a teepee—the first ones I saw were bought by the Festival committee. Hardly anyone even knew what a sweat lodge was. The old ways were pretty weak.

The biggest deal of Festival Days is the selection of Miss Shoshone, which is like the Tibo people's Miss America. The rules are, she has to be under twenty-one, unmarried, and an enrolled member of the tribe. The girls nominated spend a lot of time that winter and spring making themselves a grand traditional outfit, or getting a dress of their mother's or grandmother's fancied up. Some of these dresses are heirloom stuff, pretty nice—usually a buckskin dress to the knees, or a velvet or velveteen dress with cowrie shells. They wore necklaces of aurora borealis, shells, elk teeth, or bone, shell earrings, fully beaded knee leggings, and moccasins.

If you get the picture of a traditional Indian, though, like you'd see now, your picture is off. In 1967 the style for teenage girls on the rez was gloss lipstick and ratted hair, often with a rinse that made it rusty red. They wore wide headbands or beaded cardboard crowns and a feather. Remember the Supremes? Our girls were the Supremes in Injun drag.

When they made their appearance at Festival Days all decked out in this dizzy manner, everyone applauded and they felt great, and the judges chose one to be the queen of that year. In those days it was beauty and poise and dancing ability they went on. Only later were the girls asked to know something about the tradition of the clothes they wore and the dances they did. But it was pretty nice, especially when you consider that the girls mostly went from high school to being potato fleshers, the only jobs they could get, and to making babies, with or without husbands. The fathers might or might not be around while the kids were growing up, because the well-known one-vehicle accidents took them away, and the jobs they could get in the cities, and the war. Even now, unless they get interested in the spiritual path, being nominated for Miss Shoshone is a last hurrah for a lot of girls.

Berdina was determined to win. She had our grandmother's velveteen dress, and she got her girlfriends to do practice radio interviews. For our girls that was the hardest. A deejay came out from KISS Radio in town and interviewed the candidates. Most of them faded away into a cloud of giggles. But Berdina was prepared. That's why I knew she wouldn't cap it all by showing up the big night with a Navajo kid no one knew who acted sullen and still had a sickly jail look on him.

Loo didn't know any of that. So I went down to the rusted-out Buick a couple of nights before to tell him.

He wasn't there, of course. Since that first day, when I went down after supper to take him some blankets, I'd known he walked at night. He walked the irrigation ditches mostly, I don't know why. You could see him walking the laterals in the dark, and they just peter out in the pastures, so he'd go down and back and along the main ditch to another, and down and back, pointlessly. He must have been unable to sleep, trying to think things out, or maybe running from dreams. Where he'd been, I guess he had some rotten dreams, and probably some tough memories.

Even by moonlight, I could see the shame on Loo's face. He didn't say what he'd done, or been accused of.

I found him in the dark and got him to stop for a man on crutches

and told him as gently as I could that Berdina was a flirt and a tease and she liked to bring boys to her flame like moths, but she wasn't going to act like he was her date because that would make a bad impression on the judges. As a matter of fact, she was going to have Dad for her proper escort, and Scott Williams to flirt with, and afterward they would disappear in Scott's red Mustang.

His answer was simple. "You don't want me around your sister, that's all." He walked along quiet for a minute, then stopped and faced me. "You know what I am. I've been in jail in Salt Lake." Even by moonlight I could see the shame on his face. He didn't say what he'd done, or been accused of.

"That ought to be an end to it, but it ain't. Nobody will give me a job or a chance. You Big Bucks are rich Injuns, with this big place, and as soon as you get your hay in, so you can feed your cows when other Injuns will never own a cow, you'll be telling me good-bye."

He actually said *good-bye*—and looked me hard in the face when he did it. Indians don't ever say *good-bye* because it means forever. They say *so long* or *see you* or the like, instead. But Loo meant that as soon as we'd had the use of him, we'd want to be rid of him for good. Which was pretty near right, and I felt lousy about it.

"You can count on one thing," he said. "I won't knock her up like her white boy will. I'm going to take Berdina to Festival Days and buy her a cola and we're going to enjoy ourselves."

His tone added, And that's an end to it. Both to the decision and to this conversation.

He actually said *good-bye*—and looked me hard in the face when he did it. Indians don't ever say *good-bye* because it means forever.

There wasn't much to say to that, so he went back to his night walking. Something had started bothering me, and I had to ask. "We just call you Loo," I said. "What's your name?"

He smiled at me funny, probably tickled that we had typed him, just like the Tibos type Injuns. "David," he said. "Not Begay. David Klah."

I wondered at the time if he was related to Hosteen Klah, who was a big medicine singer among the Navajos—so big we'd heard of him clear up in Idaho. But he never did say.

I decided to keep calling him Loo, since I'd gotten his real name in confidence. And I hoped he wouldn't keep calling me Arnie Big Bucks.

I told Berdina to tell Loo she wasn't going to the big night with him, but she didn't. The whole bunch of us piled up in the back of Dad's old pickup, sitting on hay bales, and rode over to the baseball diamond near the tribal court building. Berdina was decked out in grandmother's dress she'd worked on all winter—midnight blue with ribbons in lavender and green and silver, and a white shawl—her hair ratted high, sparkly cut-beaded moccasins, and beaded leggings that rose to midcalf. She wouldn't sit in the back of the pickup with the rest of us, for fear of getting road dust and hay on her dress. My oh my, didn't she flirt with Loo. She asked him to sit next to her in the cab with Dad and Mom, squeezed close together like they were on a date. Loo gave me a victory smile through the rear glass.

He looked pretty good himself. Wednesday morning he'd told Dad he had some personal business in Bucks, and Dad could dock him a whole day's pay if he wanted to, but he had to go to town after lunch, and could he have his time. Dad gave him the money, including half a day's pay for that day. When he took off hitchhiking toward the highway, those few dollars in his pocket, Uncle Stuart said that was the last we'd ever see of him. The last sober, at the very least. I knew better.

I raked with Uncle Stuart while Loo was gone, though it hurt my ankle. I figured I owed both him and Dad that. Loo was back in a couple of hours and took over like nothing had happened. Uncle Stuart, surprised to see Loo, didn't say anything belittling for a while. But Stuart raked until you couldn't see squat that night. Loo didn't say a word, working for free, he must have thought, and I helped them put the rake in the barn in pitch dark. That night he asked Mom to borrow some soap, and toward midnight I saw him working on the bank of the ditch. The next day I saw a white shirt laid out on the roof of the car with rocks holding it down.

Here in the pickup I saw what he'd bought, apparently in the pawnshop and the secondhand store. He had a cowboy hat now, a belt with a big rodeo buckle, and tight Wranglers, which Navajos prefer to Levi's because they are slim-hipped. The best part, though, was a beautiful satin cowboy shirt of glossy white, with mother-of-pearl snaps, and a black cowboy scarf at the neck. The stuff wasn't new—you could see the fraying on the shirt cuffs—but it dressed him up smart, and he looked like he'd scrubbed his hair and himself good, probably in the ditch with the same soap. The last touch was very Navajo. He had wrapped the pointy toes of his old cowboy boots with silvery duct tape, like a lot of them did in those days. Navajos like anything that shines silver.

I was impressed, but also sorry he'd gone to so much trouble when he was going to get that shirt dirtied, maybe bloodied or torn, before the night was over.

It could have happened at any time, but it was the war that provided the excuse. Loo was buying my sister a beaded barrette at old Edna's outdoor booth, though beadwork wasn't as popular then as now. Berdina was holding it up to her hair, preening and smiling and asking her friends how it looked. She ought to have been thinking how it would cost Loo the last of what he'd earned in a week of long days haying, but not Berdina. Anything she could get you to do for her, she would.

I was looking for someone to flirt with, even someone I'd known all my life. Partying sounds real good when you think about boot camp and then jungles and monsoons and rice paddies where Americans died. I was a virgin those days.

Uncle Stuart was watching us all like he was tickled. Boy and girl stuff always seemed to tickle him. He lived his whole life with our grandmother and took care of her and never even had a date, as far as I know.

Scott Williams walked up right then with two of his buddies from town, Tim and Andy, whose last names I didn't know—teenage Tibos traveling in gangs for safety on the rez, where the only predators were them. Tim was drunk, and Scott and Andy had had a few.

You know I didn't like Scott's wildness. I also didn't like him because he was good-looking in his smooth, Tibo way, cocky, and a high-school track star, and was home for the summer between going to the University of Utah, which he acted like made him something. Which it kind of did on the rez because there wasn't much way any of us could think of college. And he had that new red Mustang convertible, on account of his father was the Ford dealer. Altogether I was good and tired of seeing him and his car with the big foam dice hanging from the rearview mirror, and thinking what he was doing to my sister.

When Scott came up, Berdina gave him a grand smile, just like he wasn't trouble, and showed him how pretty the barrette was. It was a geometrical pattern in Cheyenne pink and Crow blue on a white background, with a zipper stitch around the edge. Scott smiled back like it was very groovy, and Loo standing there staring didn't mean a rat's ass to him.

Scott said he had some news, and you could see him and his buddies practically flexing their muscles to make the cigarette packs rolled up in their T-shirt sleeves bulge out. He wasn't going back to college, he said. He was headed for flight school in Texas next month and would be flying in 'Nam early next year. It took us all a minute to register that flying in 'Nam meant fighter planes, combat, the real stuff.

Most Shoshones my age had heard from our draft board, but we weren't going to any flight school, or sailing the sky in any silver birds. We were going to be cannon fodder, as the TV put it those days. Newbies, as the other soldiers called us—untrained new guys. Scott's bragging was the kind of thing that makes you feel like the redskin on the bottom of the totem pole. Of course, among the totem-pole-building people of the Pacific Northwest, the bottom face is the most important one, but we didn't know that then.

> "I was buying the lady a barrette," said Loo, quietly but with an edge of warning.

It was Loo who spoke up. "If they draft me," he said, "I'm going to be a C. O. medic." Something about the way he said it was like flicking drops of water into Scott's face, but none of us paid any attention to that at first. We were too busy being surprised. Most of us wanted to fight—counting coup went a long way among most In-

juns, and we saw it as our big chance, the only chance we'd get. Navajos fought, too—all Injuns had heard how they'd made themselves heroes as code talkers in World War II. And here was this kid we called Loo, short for lieutenant, declaring he didn't mean to fight like he was proud of it.

"Well, ain't he the brave one, this flashy-dressed Nava-GI-Joe," said Tim with a slur.

The word play tickled Scott and he laughed. Then he took Berdina's arm and started to walk away. She didn't hang back a bit.

While we were in the sweat, I asked for help facing up to war. Loo asked forgiveness for what he did down in Salt Lake.

"I was buying the lady a barrette," said Loo, quietly but with an edge of warning.

"Well," said Scott, turning around suddenly, "is this the one?" He pointed to what was still in Berdina's hand, then whipped out his wallet and handed old Edna a five-dollar bill. Looking Loo hard in the eye, he said, "It was nice of you to offer."

"But she don't want it from no Cowardly Objector," said Andy, picking up his cue.

"The Injun ain't wanting to be nice, neither," put in Tim, slurring the words. "He wants some pussy."

"Tonight it's gonna be *grand prize* pussy," added Andy mockingly.

Scott laughed with them.

Loo's punch caught him in the ear. It knocked him off balance a little, and he was getting to his feet when the second one hit him. It cut his mouth and made him reassess things for the blink of a second. The third one broke his nose and threw blood all over his shirt, and Loo's fine shirt, and Berdina's dress that belonged to our grandmother.

By that time I had Loo by the arms from behind. Tim was coming up with a foot at his crotch and Loo wrenched sideways to take it on his hip, and before I realized what was happening, I saw the gleam of Uncle Stuart's knife. Suddenly Tim was on the ground holding his tit, blood oozing around his fingers, and Uncle Stuart's blade was at his throat, and the old man was telling those Tibo kids to get their asses off the rez. The only one who wasn't hurt, Andy, got to hustling his bloodied friends out of there quick.

Berdina didn't know what to do. She just stood there with her hand over her mouth and her eyes big as moons. She might have gone making cooing sounds after Scott, I think, but she'd seen him laugh about grand prize pussy.

I reappraised Uncle Stuart with my eyes. I'd known him my whole life and never knew his work boot was full of knife. Maybe he had learned something back there in World War II.

Loo was the one who acted with sense. He took Berdina by the arm and said it was time to get over to the hay wagon. They were about to name Miss Shoshone. Dad was waiting to escort her up onto the stage, and she was so beautiful she was bound to win.

Loo probably realized that if we stood around there a minute more the tribal police would show up. In those more innocent days they responded to fistfights, and just to break them up.

The rest of the evening was a muddle for me. Berdina didn't win Miss Shoshone. She cried on Loo's shoulder just like he wasn't a Navajo whose real name she didn't even know. Mom and Dad told her the judges had decided hours ago, so it wasn't because her dress had tiny speckles of blood if you looked close. She and Loo spent the rest of the night holding hands and waists, and I wouldn't be surprised if later Loo didn't get what Scott had been looking for. She acted like he was her hero.

In an hour or so Uncle Stuart said to me, "I'm going up to the camp." Which was where he hunted deer on Conant Mountain, same place every fall, all alone. I knew where it was, but I'd never even gotten out of the pickup there. "Meet me there tomorrow by noon. Bring plenty to eat." I knew he intended to stay up at the camp for a while, until the police lost interest. He had plenty of time to get there—county police couldn't arrest anyone on the rez without going before the tribal council to get a warrant—but there was no way a red man could cut a Tibo and not end up in jail those days, not if you let them catch you. "Bring the Loo," he said. "Be sure to." And he was gone.

We took Uncle Stuart nourishment for the body, and he gave us nourishment for the soul. The sweat lodge. For the first time I

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saw he'd built one in the old way, out of sight in the bushes. When we got there, he had a fire going and the rocks were hot. He said brusquely, "You need to sweat; get stripped." Neither one of us had ever been in the sweat before. It was old-fashioned stuff to me, and I hadn't wanted anything to do with it—didn't even know anybody who'd been in one. But the look in Uncle Stuart's eye made me obey, and Loo as well.

Loo didn't understand the prayers because they were in Shoshone, but I told him afterward that mainly Uncle Stuart prayed for cleansing of the spirit, cleansing from the blood he and Loo had shed. I thought a minute and added, plus cleansing for me before I went into battle halfway around the world.

While we were in the sweat, Uncle Stuart gave me and Loo a chance to say whatever was on our minds. I asked for help facing up to going to war. I spoke to whatever Spirit there might be in the world, not knowing then if there was any. Loo asked forgiveness for what he'd done down in Salt Lake. He confessed to Spirit he'd gone to the drunk tank overnight and while he was there lost his temper and hit a guard who gave him some lip. He ended up doing eighteen months. What he wanted from Spirit was the strength not to lose his temper, like he did that time, and again just last night.

When I look back at that summer, it seems to me a lot of things got switched around because of Loo. He stayed on for a while to do Uncle Stuart's work while he was on the lam, and lived with us like family. Right on through the second cutting he stayed, and then worked the potato sorting in September, and was still there the day I got inducted. He and Berdina did a lot of making out, but he finally went back to his rez, nervous about facing his family after his time in jail.

I am okay. On April 1, which the Tibo people call April Fool's Day, I took shrapnel in the knee and was sent home with a Purple Heart. Later that month Berdina gave birth to Lucy Bucks, my niece, named after our grandmother. She's one of the gifts of my life. She's twenty-three now, in law school down at the university in Salt Lake, learning how to fight for Indian rights, she says.

She's Scott Williams's daughter, of course. But Berdina put Loo on her birth certificate as the father, even though none of us ever saw Loo until two months after Berdina was pregnant. Berdina resolved never to tell Lucy she's half Tibo, not half Navajo. By luck she looks Injun as can be.

Scott Williams flew his silver bird over the jungle, fell out of the sky, and burned up. There wasn't enough left to fill a body bag.

A little later Berdina flipped her pickup into a ditch. The same fate as Scott Williams, without the glamour. It was the usual rez one-vehicle accident for the usual rez reason, drunkenness.

So my niece has been my daughter all these years.

I got one letter from Loo, when I'd finished rehab on my knee and was about to start college. To my relief it was addressed to Arnie Bucks, not Arnie Big Bucks. I kept it:

* * *

Dear Arnie:

I was a medic in 'Nam and am okay. Hear you came out of it not too bad. Am learning to sing the Blessing Way from my grandfather. He says it takes about twenty years to learn, so I guess I won't be coming your way for a while. I owe you, Bucks, and I will cut some prayer sticks for you. If you ever are thirsty on the Navajo rez, the coffeepot's on, and my temper is cool.

So long,

David Klah

That's the way things came out. I think all of us who were in 'Nam hear a kind of funeral music in our heads the rest of our lives.

Myself, I used the GI Bill when I got back to go to Idaho State and get certified to teach.

When I got back from 'Nam with the stiff knee I still have, I went right back into the sweat lodge with Uncle Stuart. And kept going and kept going, first to ask for healing for my knee, then for my spirit, and finally for the spirits of all my people and all people who walk the earth.

Uncle Stuart taught me the way of the sweat before he died. I haven't missed sweating many Saturdays in the twenty-three years since. As you know, in the late seventies lots of Indians got interested in it again, and the low huts are a common sight on the rez now. I've learned all the other old ways I can, as Loo is doing, and I teach them to my students, and try to make them proud of what they are—full-blood, mixed-blood, Navajo, Mexican, or whatever tribe, and Tibo, too.

I feel hopeful.

Osihoyunde. That's the word we Shoshones have for the *aho* of the Lakota, or the *amen* of the Tibos. It means, "Thank you, it is finished."

BY

Jane Candia Coleman

It was how Charley Barnes died that set folks talking, not that some didn't think it better than most ways of departing this earth.

"That was Charley," Jake Wiggins said when we were all sitting around talking and remembering. "Always after a woman."

"If I had a choice between livin' alone or dyin' in Lou Simms's arms, I'd sure choose livin' alone," I said.

We all laughed, but as far as I was concerned, that was the pure truth. I'd seen better looking faces on cows out on the range.

"You must be gettin' old, Luther," Tom Eakin said. "Now Charley, he knew how to keep young. He just changed women every so often."

"Time Lou Simms starts lookin' good to me, you'll know I'm old. And blind, too," I said.

Thing was, we were all the same age as Charley. We'd all grown up together, been working and socializing together since we were boys. And now there was Charley, laid out in his front parlor, waiting for the preacher. It made me feel mortal, like maybe

someday soon I'd be next, just by doing something purely natural.

"Thing about Lou," Jake said, "is she's peaceful. She don't talk too much."

"Don't have to," I said.

Jake grinned. "That's so. And Charley had a bellyful of talk from Jo-Etta anyhow."

Everybody up Horse Creek remembers Jo-Etta. She was Charley's second wife; yellow-headed, full-breasted, with the damnedest little feet that were always on the move, just like her mouth. After ten years those little feet ran off with a dentist from Phoenix, leaving Charley wide open for Lou, who'd had a crush on him since she was ten.

ou set that pony on us in the water, a-whipping her reins from side to side, not caring who she hurt or rode over.

"Jo-Etta had a laugh just like a crazy person," I said.

Tom looked at me. "You're the *pickinest* son of a bitch," he said. "I sure don't know how Kate ever caught you."

"Me neither," I said, and meant it. I'd been a widower about five years by then and I liked it—the quiet, the freedom, no one telling me to shave, or wipe my feet, or stop making music when I damn well pleased, even at two in the morning.

Thing is, a man don't need all that much sleep as he gets older. A nap here and there does it. A snooze midday when the sun gets hot, in a chair out under the trumpet vine, with the wings of the hummingbirds all around, blurry, fast-moving, making your eyes want to close.

I never knew nights were so interesting, either. Farming, ranching, feeding four kids and a wife, don't leave time to appreciate the dark. A man's tired come nightfall. Now, though, I set up a lot watching the coons that come by looking for a handout, and the skunks, all bright-eyed and sleek as cats. And once in a while, if I set right still, I'll catch the coyotes drifting past like smoke, so quiet it's hard to believe they can cry like the damned. It's something to see—something I missed when I was young and courting, and older and hard at work. Growing old, being single, have their strong points.

"Won't no woman catch me again, anyway," I said.

"Amen," said Tom.

Out in Jake's kitchen the rackety old phone on the wall rang three times. We heard Faye answer, heard her voice change from curious to cold polite, the way a woman does when she's riled and showing it.

When she came to the parlor door, she looked at me as if I'd sprouted horns and a tail. "It's for you, Luther," she said, her nose all pinched and righteous. "It's Lou Simms."

Tom gave a whoop. "Look out, Luther. Your turn's coming!" He slapped his thigh.

Faye looked at him, bristling. "You stop it right now, Tom Eakin," she said, as if he was five years old instead of seventy, and she was his mother. Some women are like that. They go to their graves sure they were put here to save men from disgracing themselves.

Poor Jake, I thought as I picked up the phone.

"Hello, Lou," I said. I could feel Faye's eyes on me from behind, could see her puffed up like a hen, indignant that a fallen woman could call into her kitchen, summon one of us to the telephone, and her helpless to stop it.

Jake had been right about one thing. Lou didn't talk much, and when she did it was in a low voice, harmonious, like a good fiddle. I don't think I ever noticed her voice before that night.

Turned out she needed pallbearers to help load the coffin on the truck and get Charley to the Barnes's burying ground. One of his sons had come out for the funeral. The other, filled up with Holy Word, had stayed in town.

"We'll come," I told her. "Don't you worry."

Then, for no reason at all, I started remembering. Like I said, we'd all grown up together, gone to school together, and as kids we'd all teased Lou for following Charley around like he was Chief Injun.

There had been one hot day toward the end of summer when us boys had been sent to check fence in the scrub and up on the slope of the mountain.

We came down tired, hot, and dusty. When we got to the stock tank we stripped naked and went in, and never mind who come along to see us. Well, Lou did, riding that little gray mustang she had like she'd grown on him.

She wasn't any prettier then, as I recall—all eyes and pigtails, and solemn-faced, like she was thinking things she couldn't say. And we started to shout and tease, the way boys do—nasty things, or so we thought, like, "Look out, Charley! Here comes Lou to ass-ay you!" And we flipped ourselves on

our backs in the water so as to give her a look at us, boys and proud of it.

And she sat there awhile, hunched up on the pony's back, her mouth tight shut, her cheeks red as coals, and then it was like something broke in her. She set that pony on us in the water, rode straight out a-splashing and a-whipping her reins from side to side, not caring who she hurt or rode over. Just mad and shouting, "Don't *dare!* Don't you *dare!*" at us as if we'd done something awful, touched something sacred and made it profane, and maybe we had, just out of dumb cussedness.

Funny thing is, we never talked about it later, not even among ourselves. One of those reins caught Charley across the cheek and left a welt, and I had a sore leg for a month from where that pony's hoof caught me, but we never told no one. We were shamed by that little stick of a girl, and deserved it, too.

Standing there in Faye's kitchen I could see the whole scene as if it was in front of me. I could see Lou that minute, bony and thin-shanked, her mouth closed in on itself. Hadn't she ever been young? I wondered. Skittery? Giggling with the rest of the girls? Or had she always been the way I was seeing her—secretive, hunched around her feelings, letting no one see them except for that one time when she rode us down?

"I'm sorry about Charley," I told her. "We all are."

"Thank you," she said. Then she was silent.

I could hear the wire crackling. A storm somewhere, I thought, and her down there alone with Charley's corpse. "You want some of us to come down and set with you awhile?"

I heard Faye sniff behind me at the same time I heard Lou laugh, short and dry and not without understanding.

"Thanks," she said again. "I'm all right. I'm used to it."

"You need anything, you call, hear?" I said. "Me or Jake, we'll come down."

Faye sniffed again.

"I know you mean well," she said when I hung up. "And you know I believe in helping my neighbor. But you ain't volunteering Jake to go set with Lou Simms."

I said, "Why is it we call her *Lou Simms*, like she's a stranger?"

She gave me a look. "Because she is. We all grew up together, but she's set herself apart. She's lived down there in sin all this time and nary a word to any of us. Like we was the sinners."

"Maybe we are," I said. I wasn't about to back down from those mean little eyes of hers. That was Jake's problem.

She folded her arms tight. "You forget, all of us got married legal," she said.

"There's other ways of sinnin'," I said and wondered, even as I did, why I was taking Lou's part. Maybe it had been something in her voice. Or maybe it was that memory of her, no bigger than a grasshopper, but full of wrath and a kind of shining courage.

Tom was wondering the same thing. "What'd she say to you?" he asked. "Ten minutes ago you were pokin' fun at her."

"She didn't say much. Just asked would we help with the coffin. Would we be there."

"Well, we will," Jake said. "And let that be an end to it. Hell, it's Charley's funeral."

Faye said, "I'm not going." Then she looked at us, daring us to say different.

"Come tomorrow, you'll change your mind," Jake said, and I'd have bet on it. She'd no more let Jake walk alone into that house of sin than she'd let him out of her sight on market day for fear he'd drink too much or be lured into the bawdy house by some female.

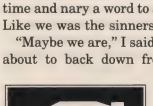
I was laughing when I put on my hat. The older I get, the funnier human nature gets. I'd meant it about there being other ways of sinning. Mean-spiritedness is just as bad as blind generosity sometimes. Faye is mean-spirited. Just a-holding on to everything for fear she'll be left without.

I patted her shoulder. "You come, Faye. We'll need protection."

"Don't you poke fun at me, Luther!" she snapped. "I don't understand you tonight."

"Me neither," I said. I went out and sat in my truck a spell before I started home.

Don't know what started me remembering. Maybe it was talking about Charley. Maybe it was re-



harley took Lou on the floor, gawky legs and all, and swung her around like she didn't weigh more than milkweed down.

membering Lou on that gray mustang. Whatever it was, it seemed I couldn't stop. All the way up Horse Creek I kept seeing things like they had been. Scenes just as clear as motion pictures went through my mind. I kept remembering about being young, about growing up out here when the land was wide open, when time was still slow and we were sure we had the best of it.

I remembered Lou's mother, a plain woman, a widow, who hung on to her homestead by taking boarders and running a few head of cattle. Lou helped, and a cowboy named Billy who was too old to work for one of the big outfits. No one ever knew his other name. No one ever asked, or asked what the relationship was between him and the widow. There wasn't time for talk or visiting in that house. Nor for laughter, neither. Maybe that accounts for the way Lou turned out. It's like she grew up fast but stayed hungry for the twirled out and her hair flew, and they were laughing the way a man and woman do when they're sure of each other and happy.

But Annie was always looking out for others. It was her way. When the set was done she whispered to Charley, and he said, "Aw!" loud enough so we all heard. She insisted, though, and he went to Lou and took her out on the floor, gawky legs and all, and swung her around like she didn't weigh more than milkweed down. Probably didn't. There never was much food in the Simms house.

When the music stopped and he set her down, those eyes of hers were so big they near spilled over her cheeks, and she smiled up at Charley, hardly more than a jerk of her mouth, but I tell you, I remember that look. Like she'd seen paradise just for a minute.

And Charley, well, he said his thank-you and went back to Annie, and Lou got asked to dance by

ou must have thought what it would be like with Annie gone...but she didn't have any female tricks. She was just herself.

things she couldn't have. Like childhood. Like Charley.

I remembered a dance we had once when Charley was already courting my sister Annie. Someone had got Lou out of her old pants and shirt and into a dress for the evening. And she had her hair tied back with a green ribbon. When she come in, she stood there by herself, her shoulders bunched up and her eyes watchful, like a filly ready to scatter.

Charley was swinging Annie around the floor so her skirts the rest of us. Seemed like to her, we weren't even there. That she was still dancing with Charley, no matter who was holding her.

"Wish she wouldn't keep lookin' at me," he said later, when we'd gone outside. "She just looks, like she's a mute or something."

"Maybe she's scairt," I said.

"Scairt? Her? Hell, she rode us down." He rubbed his cheek where the welt had been. The mark was still there. You had to look close, under his beard, but it was there.

"Well, maybe she ain't got words," I said.

"Just as well. Then I'd have to listen." He turned and went back inside to Annie.

They were married the next year in midsummer; the corn high, the cattle fattening, the rains coming often and hard enough to keep the grass green.

Annie made a pretty bride. She wore grandma's old veil and a dress out of the catalog. White and frilly it was, and feminine, like she was.

Right before the company was expected, Lou rode up carrying a wet gunnysack. "I brought flowers," she said. "A wedding needs flowers."

Now, she's one of those rare women who have a knack for gardening. Make anything grow, she could, from the time she was old enough to dig. She had peach and apple trees she'd raised from seeds, and her vegetables were always tastier than anybody else's. She had herbs, too, and knew what they were used for, and along her corral fence, under the windmill, she'd planted lilies. I don't know where she got them, but when they bloomed they were like nothing I'd ever seen. Big and white and deep, and purple inside, with black stamens that shone when the sun hit them. And that's what she brought in the sack. Bunches of them to put around the parlor.

During the ceremony they began to smell so sweet we all got light-headed, like we were dreaming. And off in a corner was Lou in that bad-fitting best dress of hers, her hands in fists and her mouth tight, watching while the preacher made Annie and Charley man and wife.

Annie hugged her after. Said thanks for the flowers and come visit real soon. Lou nodded the littlest bit, said "Maybe," and started for the door.

"Stay awhile," I told her.

"There's food and grandma's wine."

She shook her head. "Got to get back to milk. Billy's off somewhere, and Ma can't handle that old cow."

"Those flowers were fine," I said. "Right for a wedding."

She swung up on the gray and looked down at me, still-faced. "Or a funeral." She lifted her hand. "See you."

I stared after her dust the longest time, thinking that her feelings ran so deep that for her, Annie's wedding *was* a funeral. Then I told myself she must have been fooling, trying to make a joke without knowing how. No little gawk of a girl would take on so over Charley. Hell, she wasn't but fourteen, and Charley a man already. But I puzzled over it a long time; recalled it that night before Charley's funeral and wondered at just how patient and faithful a woman with her mind made up can be.

Time I got home I was so full of memories I couldn't sleep. I got a beer and my mouth organ, and settled down in my chair under the vine. I made music awhile, the old songs—"Laredo" and "The Cowboy Waltz"—except that dead cowboy made me think about Charley some more, and Lou, who'd set up with more dead in that parlor than any of us.

I got to thinking how she set up with Annie, even laid her out in the same white dress she'd been married in. Only it never seemed like Annie lying there, more like some old woman, her mouth caved in from hard living.

After the first boy come, Annie never got well again. Something happened, a woman's trouble never mentioned in front of the men but there, like a wound that don't quite heal.

She got thin, and her red hair that had been so bright turned dusty, and she had a way of stopping to catch her breath when she laughed, or when she was hauling water.

Those nights when us boys got together to play cards or make music, she'd disappear, go off to bed like a shadow. She told me she liked to lie in the dark listening to the songs she used to dance to.

It's hard on a man having a wife who's sickly. Harder still to watch her shut down on living like those lilies do after one day of blooming.

I was going to lay to rest the man who killed my sister but who had been my best friend.

I don't know, looking back, whether I wasn't a mite angry at Charley when he said a second child was coming, and Annie barely able to get around. A man's got rights, but a woman's got rights, too. Annie was my sister, and I'd always looked out for her.

I was married by then myself, but Kate was like a piece of elastic. She snapped right back, no matter what. I never heard a complaint from her, but then I took care not to give her any reason.

Just about everybody tried to help Annie. Kate would drive down in the wagon with soup in a bucket under her feet, and she'd set the house to rights and see to Jim, Charley and Annie's little boy.

Back then was when folks first started talking about Lou. Sometimes she'd ride in late, after her chores were done, put a meal on the table, and not ride home till first light. But she never listened to the talk, or didn't care. She was there, making concoctions out of herbs for Annie, serving up dinner for Charley, putting little Jim to bed on time.

She must have thought what it would be like with Annie gone. She must have once in a while pretended when Charley come in from the barn, but she didn't have any female tricks. She was just herself. Maybe if she'd prettied herself up, learned how to smile at a man, Charley wouldn't have taken up with Jo-Etta. But that's not the way it happened.

I see now, though I didn't then, that Tom Eakin was right. Charley did change women every so often. He liked women—the pretty ones first, then the faithful like Lou. He liked being with them, loving them, being made much of by them. He was a tomcat, though I never, till just now, thought that.

When Annie had her health and was perky and prettier than anyone else, he was satisfied. But when she couldn't keep up with him, well, he hung around awhile, long enough to give her a second child, and then he went off to town and found Jo-Etta.

Once again Lou didn't have a chance. She was with Annie during the birth. She was with Annie, holding her hand, when she died. She washed her, and laid her out, and set with her, and after it was all over she found a wet nurse for the baby, and kept order in that house and in her own with the strength of four women. Charley never noticed. Six months later he married Jo-Etta, and Lou went on home.

I rode down one evening just to thank her for being good to Annie. I couldn't get it out of my mind that Annie had died without any-

one there but Lou. The baby had come before its time, and those two girls had brought it to life alone. Only Annie had paid.

Lou was out in her garden. She'd run an old hose from the tank to the plot for water, and the smell of that water was plain in the dry air.

"I want to thank you," I said. "For being good to Annie."

She nodded at me and went back to picking snap beans. I noticed how careful her fingers were among the plants. Quick, sure, light, leaving the leaves and vines unhurt.

"I did what I had to," she said after a minute, her voice muffled.

"You were there. She could've been alone."

She nodded again. "I did it for myself," she said. "Not for her."

I thought about that. "Sometimes doin' for ourselves, we do for others," I said. I couldn't think how else to say it, but it seems to me that sometimes, helping ourselves, we spread the good around.

She got up, dusted her hands together, and looked at me. "I never wished her dead. You know that."

I did, too. There wasn't any evil in her, only the need to give what she had to one person. Charley. I didn't understand it, but I could accept it, which is more'n most folks did.

I put my hands on her shoulders. They felt like broomsticks poking up under her skin, under that man's blue shirt she always wore.

"Damn it all," I said. "Why can't you pick someone else? There's plenty men'd have you."

"Because he's mine," she said. She jerked away from me like I had intentions, which I sure hadn't. She went to the fence, took down the bars of the gate. "Come get a drink before you leave."

Now, it's been my observation that things happen when the time is right. Like the Bible says, "To everything its season," and there's truth in that. Folks can't force things, can't make plans and ever be sure because if the time isn't right, those plans come to nothing.

I don't know but that a woman doesn't put her mark on things in a house the way a man puts his mark on the land he works.

Lou maybe knew that, even when she was a young'un, and just settled into herself to wait it out. Because when Jo-Etta run off with that dentist of hers, there was Charley, riding by Lou's more than he'd ever done in his life.

He'd stop to talk over the fence, or he'd set on the porch with her till long after dark. Maybe he needed the peace and quiet. A man gets tired of running after a while. Even the wild ones want to settle. Or maybe it was pleasant being accepted for what he was by a woman who'd never made him out to be more, who just loved him come hell or high water.

I never asked why they didn't get married legal. It wasn't my business. They both seemed happy, and who was I to say? Even Kate took a practical view, though she was one of the few women who did. "Let them be," she said. "Folks do what they need, and no words'll change them."

She was right. She was a smart woman who never minded when us boys got together at Charley's. Never minded it when we were served coffee and pie by a fallen woman. "Leave her be," she'd say. "She's had enough trouble in her life."

And now here I was, getting ready to put an end to a part of my own life. I was going to lay to rest the man who, though I'd never admitted it, had killed my sister but who'd been my best friend.

I fell asleep in my chair thinking about that, and when I woke it was first light and the mockingbirds were making fun of the world in the oak tree, and down over the field the jays were at it, full of argument. And Howler, my old hound, was coming back from where he'd been with a grin on his face and his eyes all yellow and shining.

I showered and shaved, and got out my old black suit I hadn't worn in years. The moths had been at it, but I figured no one would notice, or if they did, they'd figure what a shame I had no woman to do for me.

I fed the dog and the couple of hens that had escaped the coyotes, and I filled a basket with peaches from my tree because folks are always hungry after a burying.

When I stopped at Jake's I found him dressing up like me, and Faye in her good black dress, holding on to a basket of food like a buzzard was about to swoop down and snatch it from her.

"Change your mind?" I asked her.

"My parents and Charley's come out here together," she said. "This is the least I can do." She didn't look at me. Kept her eyes down prim and proper.

"That's nice," I said. I meant it. One excuse is as good as another.

Jake drove us in his old Ford, and all the way Faye clucked and twittered in the back seat, brainless as a hen.

Jim, Annie and Charley's son, was on the porch when we got there.

"Where's *she?"* Faye said to us.

Jake turned around. "You hush, woman," he said. "And you behave. Or I'll turn around and take you home and tell them all the reason why. This is a funeral, not Judgment Day, and you're not the voice of the Lord."

"I was just wonderin'," she said.

"Well, don't." He opened the car door. "I've always admired a peaceful woman."

Jim, redheaded like Annie, shook our hands. He remembered how Lou had come in and cared for him. Like me, he didn't dwell on legalities.

"You go on in, Luther," he said. "She's grieving, but she won't show it."

I took off my hat and stepped into the kitchen. Now, I've always said you can tell a woman's ways from her kitchen, and I've loved that room of Lou's for twenty years. It has a speaking quality, a happiness I never found anywhere else, not even in my own place.

It's got shelves full of preserves and vegetables, the colors just shining out of the jars, and in summer it's cool, shaded by the vine Lou planted that goes right up the side of the house and over the window. And her yellow cat, Texas, is there, sleeping his nights off on the windowsill or sprucing himself up for another.

I don't know but that a woman doesn't put her mark on things in a house the way a man puts his mark on the land he works. Whatever, that kitchen is Lou, quiet but full up with things in order, stored away for when they'll be needed. Only some things wouldn't be needed anymore. Charley was gone.

She was by the coffin, stiff, like

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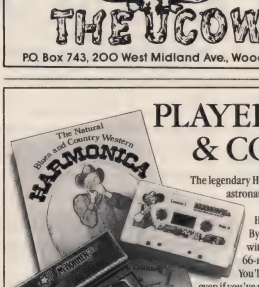

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she hadn't moved in days, and I felt for her more than for Charley, laying there at peace. She'd spent a lot of her life storing things up, waiting around, and now she was left looking little and purposeless.

I put my hands on her shoulders like I had once before, and felt her, skin and bones, a bird I could pick up in my hands. She didn't shake me off this time, just stayed there looking up at me with those gray eyes of hers.

"I'm sure sorry," I said. It was a dumb thing to say, but what else was there?

"I know," she said.

"Anything I can do?" I asked, thinking if she gave me some chore I could take my mind off things.

She shook her head. "Help me get through it. Then I can go wait my turn. I'm good at that."

"You sure are." I smiled a bit, thinking back. "You're the waitinest woman I ever knew."

"I set up last night thinking I could have done different. It was me wouldn't get married legal. I was afraid he'd want out soon as he was tied. But now it's his funeral, and even his own son won't come. Maybe I did wrong. Cut him off from people."

"Some men you can't pen up," I said. "You do and they're gone like a fence-busting bull. But you sure must've been lonely. I know what the women been sayin' all these years, and I wish I could apologize."

She shrugged, gaunt as a scarecrow in her old black dress. "I never cared for women," she said. "And I've never been lonely. I had the land. And I had Charley. No sense being greedy. Even last night I had company. Those whippoorwills down the wash just *sang*. Lots of nights we'd hear them, Charley and me. 'Just like folks,' he'd say. 'They talk just like folks.' " She folded her hands tight like she was praying. "To me it was all beautiful. It was right. But it's him I'm worried about. Did I do right by him? Make him happy?"

I looked at Charley, proper in his coffin, hands at his sides. Damned if there wasn't a hint of a smile on his face that even death couldn't take away. He'd gone out loving, and he was proud, the way an old stud horse is proud, stomping and kicking and telling the world.

I squeezed her shoulders. I thought a man could come to love her, little like she was, and faithful. And beautiful, too, all eyes, and love and worry in them the way we think a woman should be, the way we like to believe they are, even the bossy ones like Faye.

"You sure did make him happy," I said. "You did him proud."

She leaned up against me, light as a sparrow, and cried. I held her, thinking how a woman leaves a mark on a man as well as on her house. Thinking about how, over the years, this little woman had left a mark on me.

Faye stuck her head in the door just then, and from the look she gave me I supposed she'd have a lot to say, come evening.

I guessed I wouldn't say much in return. There's some moments in life so purely sweet, a man wants to keep them for himself.

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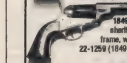
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THE PROSPECTOR AND THE PROSTITUTE

Murphey saw something move down among the Joshua trees and sagebrush where the desert canyon opened onto Shadow Valley Flats. Was it a wild burro or a deer? Or was it one of the slab-sided steers that occasionally strayed into the canyon from a windmill and water tank far out on the flats? Whatever was walking through the clump of giant cactus was meat on the hoof, and the grub box was down to pinto beans, rice, a sack of salt, and a few handfuls of cheap flour.

The prospector was puttering with the engine in his battered old Model T Ford flivver, cleaning spark plugs with his pocketknife. Cautiously, Murphey placed his knife and a spark plug on the folded-back hood of the Model T. He eased over to his shack and reached through the doorway for a .30-30 Winchester rifle that leaned against a wall.

Back at the flivver he rested the rifle barrel across the car's hood and cocked the hammer with a large and callused thumb. Murphey imagined a piece of golden brown and juicy steak on his fork. If the critter was burro or deer, steaks would have to

BY

RAY DORR

be fried in water because he had used the last of his store-bought lard to make biscuits a week earlier. Even a corriente desert steer wouldn't carry much fat on its gaunt carcass. But water-fried steak is nearly as good as grease-fried, especially if a man has been surviving mostly on beans and rice.

Already Murphey was figuring where to bury the hide and head if the animal was a branded steer. A hindquarter would be wrapped in a canvas tarp to protect the meat from blowflies and lowered into the shade of a nearby prospect shaft. The remainder of the animal would have to be toted away from the mining claim. Some cowboy might come trailing steer tracks up the canyon. The meat would be cut into thin strips and sun-dried for jerky. Murphey wished he had some pepper to discourage flies from the beef, but a few hours in the desert sun would seal the meat.

He saw definite movement now through a narrow gap between two bushes. White and brown. That'd be a steer or a buckskin. Burros are gray. The prospector licked his lips. Whatever was in the clump of Joshua trees came steadily closer along the primitive road Murphey had hacked through the cactus and brush to the tungsten outcrop he had discovered in the canyon. Murphey snuggled his cheek against the rifle stock, squinted his left eye, and sighted along the rifle barrel. His forefinger tightened on the trigger to take up slack. A twitch of that finger would send a .30-30 slug on its way to bring down enough meat for days of hog-heaven living.

A woman stepped into view over the sights of the Winchester.

Murphey's mouth dropped open.

She was a tall woman, and thin. She wore a white blouse and brown skirt. In one hand she carried a suitcase. A wadded-up jacket was clutched in the other hand.

No woman had ever visited any of Murphey's camps. And only a few men had followed the prospector's tire tracks to the shack he had built several months earlier. About once a month a Ford flivver or a battered Dodge touring car would rattle up to the claim, driven by a fellow desert rat who was starved for the sound of another human's voice. Murphey had a natural gift for telling stories, and he knew how to make a man laugh. His stories were exciting—not necessarily true, but exciting. The men would settle on their heels, cowboy style, in the shade of the lone, bushy juniper tree that grew beside the shack, and exercise their jaws. Over cups of coffee or sips of bootleg whiskey shared from a Mason jar, the men would damn the plutocrats in Washington who were ruining the mining game for the little feller, or speculate on the prospects of a recent gold strike up by Tonopah.

MURPHEY SNUGGLED HIS CHEEK AGAINST THE RIFLE STOCK, SQUINTED HIS LEFT EYE, AND SIGHTED ALONG THE RIFLE BARREL. A WOMAN STEPPED INTO VIEW OVER THE SIGHTS OF THE WINCHESTER.

Eventually talk would get around to women—those women in Barstow, a railroad town on the road to southern California, or the women up north at Las Vegas, another sun-baked railroad town. Usually conversation would lag about that time when the men remembered women they had known in their youths, before they had started along the lonesome prospecting trail. They wouldn't talk about those women; it wasn't considered proper.

"Hello!" the woman called.

She had seen Murphey peering over the hood of the car. And she had stopped.

Murphey blinked his eyes, not yet able to make the transition in his mind from steak sizzling in a frying pan to this woman standing before him. He straightened up behind the flivver.

"Howdy." His deep voice bounced off the surrounding cliffs. "You lost?"

"Are you Murphey?"

"Well, yeah. That's me."

"Oh, thank heavens. Then I'm not lost."

The woman started walking toward Murphey. She staggered in her high heels on small rocks and pebbles that covered the desert floor.

She had a good figure, though she was a bit scrawny for Murphey's tastes. Her face, plain and without makeup, was red from the blistering sun. A few strands of gray shone in a damp lock of auburn hair that hung below a close-fitting felt hat. She was about his own age—no longer a heifer, but still in the prime of life. Somehow she looked familiar. For a moment she reminded him of one of the women he had seen in the main room of a house near the railroad switching yard in Barstow, a house that was frequented by railroaders and miners. The women in that house all wore heavy

makeup and frilly bathrobes. Murphey shook his head. This woman's face and clothes were too plain for that profession.

He uncocked the rifle, laid it on the car's running board, and started toward the woman. "Let me take that suitcase, ma'am," he said.

She heaved the suitcase into his hand. "Thank you. My arm's nearly broken from carrying it." Crow's-feet crinkled back from the corners of her eyes.

"The man at Clark Mountain Station on the highway said that you lived up this road. But he indicated it wasn't very far."

"It's three miles from the highway," Murphey said. "That galoot oughta be horsewhipped for sending a lady like you out into the desert on foot. Come on over in the shade of the tree. I ain't got no chairs, but I'll get you a dynamite box to sit on, and a drink of water."

The woman stepped into the cone of shade. She slumped to the warm earth. "Don't bother about a box," she said. "I'll just sit on the ground. I certainly could use a drink of water, though. Oh, just look at my shoes. They're ruined."

Murphey went into the dirt-floored shack where he dipped a tin cupful of water from a milk can. He kept an identical can at the seep-spring up the canyon to collect water that trickled out from between two layers of limestone in the face of a cliff. He handed the pint-sized cup to the woman. She gulped the water greedily.

"Thank you so much," she said.

Murphey squatted at the edge of the shade. He pushed his black felt hat up on his forehead. It was a typical prospector's hat, much like a cowboy's hat but with a narrower brim that turned up slightly in front. Four dimples around the crown made the hat peak in the center.

"You came looking for me?"

"COME ON OVER IN THE SHADE OF THE TREE," MURPHEY SAID. "I AIN'T GOT NO CHAIRS, BUT I'LL GET YOU A DYNAMITE BOX TO SIT ON, AND A DRINK OF WATER."

"Well, not exactly," the woman said. "I was on my way to Las Vegas to . . ." she hesitated, "to help my little sister. She's about due to have a baby. I only had enough money for bus fare to Clark Mountain Station. I had hoped the bus driver would take me on to Las Vegas, but he refused. He made me get off the bus at that miserable place that's run by that horrible man."

Murphey nodded. "I know what you mean. Not much there at Clark Mountain: a gas pump, a couple of tourist cottages, and that little store where Jake Glibins charges cutthroat prices. He'll soak you thirty cents for a gallon of gas."

"He even charged me my last nickel for a drink of water."

"He would, that skinflint."

"I told the man I was broke. And I offered to work in exchange for a place to stay and just enough money for a bus ticket on into Las Vegas."

The woman compressed her lips and opened wide her eyes. They were blue. Murphey always favored women with blue eyes.

"He practically threw me out the front door," she said. "He pointed across the highway to the road beside that little sign with your name on it. He said I should go up that road if I wanted to sponge off someone because 'Murphey doesn't have any better sense than to give the shirt off his back to every stray dog that comes along.' "

The prospector made a fist of his big right hand and studied the knuckles; they were flat and scarred.

"Jake called you a stray dog?" he said.

The woman glanced nervously at Murphey. "No. He didn't exactly call me a stray dog. I probably didn't say that the way he meant it."

She hurried on. "I stood beside that hot, dusty highway for an hour, hoping someone would stop for me. Not many cars came along. And they kept right on going."

"Yeah. That's the way it is this time of day. It's a long haul up over the pass here in the Mescal Range. If you stop, the water'll boil right out of your radiator. Truckers and people who know this country travel that stretch of road in the early morning, before the day gets hot."

Murphey looked at the woman's hands. The fingers were long and narrow, the nails well manicured. There was no ring on her left hand.

"Finally I picked up my suitcase and started up your road. Walked nearly an hour. Then I got scared the road would go on forever, or it would lead to a dead end. I just knew I'd die of thirst before I could get back to the highway and that wretched man. You can't imagine how relieved I was to see you."

"You might of jumped outta the frying pan and into the fire. If you still had the nickel you gave Jake, we'd have two nickels to rub together. That's how much money is in my change purse. My wallet's

plumb flat. I've got water to drink and a bed in the shack. You're welcome to both. But all I've got to eat is beans and rice and a little flour. You're welcome to them, too."

He motioned toward a heap of rocks in the back of the Model T pickup truck. "That's high-grade tungsten ore. Hand sorted. I'm planning to take it up to the mill at the top of the pass. Trouble is, the gas tank on this old Tin Lizzie is bone dry. I been hoping for the last two weeks that another prospector would come visiting so I could borrow a gallon or two of gasoline from him."

"Then I'm a burden on you," the woman said.

"Oh, no. Don't think that. You ain't no burden at all. I just wanted you to know that I can't put on much of a spread until I sell this ore. As soon as I get some gasoline I'll be happy to take you on into Vegas."

"Right now," she said, "I'm just thankful to know I'm not going to die of thirst or heat. Thankful to run into someone like you. My name's Wilma. Wilma Titus."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Titus."

"Don't call me Miss Titus. Call me Wilma."

"Okay, Wilma. Folks call me Murphey."

"Just Murphey? No first name?"

"Just Murphey."

"I noticed on the sign by the highway that you spell your name with an *e*. That's an unusual spelling."

"I added the *e* after I ran away from home when I was a kid."

He stood up and held out his hand. "If you like, I'll show you where you can sleep," he said.

The desert man had been proud of the shack when he had first built it out of rusty sheet iron and warped boards scavenged from a deserted mining camp on the far side of the range. Now that he imagined seeing the shelter through the eyes of this woman it didn't look so grand. The small room was hot as an oven, even with the single window cranked down. The window was part of a car door salvaged from a Pierce Arrow sedan that had rolled over on the highway. Murphey had fitted the door into a wall when he had built the shack. A folding spring bed took up most of the space in the room. But the wool blankets on the bed were clean and pulled tight, a blue and white tick pillow fluffed and in place. Beside the bed, a coal-oil lantern shared space on a wooden apple box with a pair of cheap reading glasses and a stack of dog-eared books. Tin cans wired together formed the smoke pipe for a small woodstove he had constructed out of an empty twenty-pound carbide canister. The water can sat in the dirt beside the door. The door itself missed reaching the ground by a good three inches, so kangaroo rats had no trouble skipping in and out of the shack when Murphey wasn't around to set rat traps. His town clothes hung from spikes in one wall: brown corduroy pants, a plaid flannel shirt, and a nearly new Stetson hat.

> "THIS'LL PROBABLY SOUND CRAZY TO YOU, BUT WITH THOSE LITTLE BATS FLITTING AROUND AND A SOFT BREEZE MOANING DOWN FROM THE UPPER CANYON, I IMAGINE I HEAR A WALTZ."

"It ain't much, but it'll keep the rain off your head," he said.

Wilma peeked past his shoulder. "It looks wonderful. I suppose it cools off after dark."

Murphey chuckled, relieved that she wasn't too disappointed in his shack. "You bet. This is high desert country. Nearly a mile high. Days are hot but nights get cool, even this time of year."

"Where will you sleep?"

"I've got my blanket roll in the front seat of the flivver. Don't you worry about me. I'm used to sleeping out nights."

At sundown, Murphey and Wilma shared a supper of pinto beans and rice that had been cooking most of the day in a cast iron Dutch oven over a bed of coals. The prospector scooped the food onto blue speckled enamelware plates. He handed Wilma a plate and one of two spoons he owned.

"I'll make some tortillas in the morning," he said, "just to have a change of menu."

Wilma sat on an empty dynamite box, the plate balanced on her lap.

"Where'd you learn to make tortillas?" she asked.

Murphey settled cross-legged on the ground on the far side of the campfire. He nudged some beans onto his spoon with his left thumb. "From the Mexicans down in Sonora. I prospected back in the Sierra Madres for a couple of years. And I spent some time searching for buried Spanish treasure."

"Really? Did you find what you were looking for?"

"I didn't find no gold, if that's what you mean. I did find what I went down there looking for."

Wilma set the spoon on her plate. "What was that, if it wasn't gold?"

"That's kind of hard to explain to city folks. I went down there

looking to see what was on the other side of the mountain. That's what prospecting is all about. It's not the gold or tungsten. Prospectors ain't miners. Miners live cooped up in company towns and spend most of their lives in darkness, digging out ore. Prospectors think different from miners. We like fresh air and sunshine. I guess you might say prospecting is living life out in God's country."

Wilma picked up the spoon and toyed with the mound of beans that remained on her plate.

"Living life. That's interesting."

Suddenly she batted at the air in front of her face. The plate fell off her lap, into the campfire.

"Oh! What was that?"

Murphey grinned. "Don't worry. It was just a bat—a little rock bat outta the cliffs." He fished the plate out of the fire with a stick.

"A bat! It nearly hit me."

"No, it didn't. It was after the gnats that are flying around your face."

"I hate bats. I'm scared of them. They give me the creeps. I'm afraid they'll get in my hair."

"Not those little fellers. Those bats come out at sundown. They keep me company of an evening. That's a lonesome time on the desert. A time when a man hates being by hisself. Sometimes when the sun's setting I walk up behind the shack to where the canyon narrows. Right over there." Murphey pointed with the handle of his spoon. "I know this'll probably sound crazy to you, but with those little bats flitting around just above my head and a soft breeze moaning down from the upper canyon, I imagine I hear music, a waltz."

"A waltz?"

"Yeah, the 'Blue Danube' waltz. When I was a tad my ma had a pump organ in the parlor. She often played the 'Blue Danube' waltz. I loved to listen to her play that waltz. If it was of an evening, Pa would come into the parlor and stand beside Ma while she played. Then he'd take Ma's hand so she'd leave the organ. They'd waltz around the parlor like they could hear the organ playing the 'Blue Danube' waltz. Ma with her long dress sweeping the Oriental rug on the floor, Pa in his business suit."

"Your father wore a suit in the evenings?"

MUCH TO HIS OWN SURPRISE, MURPHEY FELT COMFORTABLE WITH A WOMAN LIKE WILMA IN CAMP.

"I never seen him dressed no other way. He was a cattleman and a lawyer. He was always telling me that a man is judged by the clothes he wears. Shoot fire, I wanted to dress like a cowboy, and I did."

Murphey studied a glowing ember deep in the center of the dying campfire.

"That was a long time ago," he said.

"That's a beautiful story," Wilma said. "I wish I had memories like that. Mostly, I remember Papa coming home drunk from the corner saloon."

After breakfast the next morning, Wilma wandered down to the Joshua trees for a few minutes of privacy. Instead of following the road, she walked directly toward the closest clump of giant cactus. By the time she returned to the shack she had snagged her silk stockings on the thorny catclaw, scratched one leg on a Spanish bayonet, and riddled the thin leather tops and soles of her high-heeled pumps with cholla needles.

Murphey sat on the running board of the flivver. "Them clothes ain't fit for desert living," he said. "Why don't you try on my town clothes, Wilma. You'll have to roll up the shirtsleeves and cinch in the waist of those trousers, but that outfit should protect you more than what you're wearing."

Wilma went into the shack. A few minutes later Murphey heard her laughing. She opened the door and stepped out for his inspection. The flannel shirt hung on her body like a nearly empty gunnysack. She clutched the top of the corduroy pants with one hand while she held out her other arm and pirouetted in the imitation of a clothes model.

"What do you think of my new wardrobe, kind sir?" she said.

"I think you look grand," Murphey said. "You'll need a few more vittles to grow into them clothes. In the meantime, I'll find you a piece of rope to use for a belt."

Shoes presented a more difficult problem. Murphey's high-topped town shoes were too large for Wilma's feet. He finally fashioned a passable pair of sandals out of a ruptured automobile tire casing, folding the fronts of the sandals back to protect Wilma's toes from cactus. Laces from his town shoes made bindings that came up around her ankles.

"The Mexicans down in Sonora make sandals something like these," he said.

That first morning Wilma asked Murphey if he could buy some gasoline on credit from Clark Mountain Station.

Murphey snorted. "You mean from Jake? That old penny-pincher wouldn't lend his mother the price of a meal if she was starving. Besides, I already owe

him a few dollars for grub and gas."

The next few days passed quickly with Wilma staying at the claim. Murphey loved to talk, and for the first time in years he had someone who would listen to his tales for hours on end without interrupting. Much to his own surprise he felt comfortable with a woman in camp, a woman like Wilma. She laughed at his stories that were supposed to be funny, stories of his misadventures when he was a young cowboy, a railroad construction worker, and finally a prospector. She even poked Murphey in the ribs when he told tales that were too outrageous to believe. Then, they'd laugh together.

Murphey noticed with both approval and wonder that she didn't take up a lot of time talking about her past. She mentioned she had worked as a salesgirl in the ladies' glove department of a store in Los Angeles.

"I was married once," she said one afternoon as the pair rested in the shade of the juniper tree. They had spent the morning dragging firewood to the camp from the few junipers and piñons that grew in the upper part of the canyon. "We were happy until the war came along. My husband was killed in France. Actually, he was gassed in France. He came home to die."

"Them dirty Huns," Murphey said. "I was over there myself, but never got gassed."

That was the only time Murphey mentioned his experiences in the war. He couldn't remember many wartime stories that were funny.

Wilma made herself useful around camp. She took over cooking the beans and rice after Murphey had instructed her on the technique of laying a bed of glowing coals under the Dutch oven. She boiled water in an empty tomato can for Mormon tea that was brewed from a low, stalky desert bush. In a dry wash that snaked down the canyon she scrubbed the plates and spoons clean with sand.

One afternoon Murphey was sorting ore in a pile of rock near the tailgate of the flivver when Wilma came out of the shack carrying a handful of his socks. The socks were gray, with red toes and heels. He ordered them twelve-pair-in-a-bundle from a Monkey Ward catalog. Wilma settled onto a boulder and began darning holes in the socks. Murphey watched her. He figured she must have had some proper raising in her childhood, but if she didn't volunteer information, he wasn't about to ask.

Each morning for a week Wilma asked: "Do you think one of your friends will come with gasoline today?"

"Who knows?" Murphey always replied with a shrug. He was in no hurry for her to leave.

MURPHEY REACHED OUT AND PUT AN ARM AROUND WILMA'S NARROW SHOULDERS. IT SEEMED THE NATURAL THING TO DO.

Finally Wilma stopped asking about his friends bringing gasoline. And she changed in little ways. She seemed more relaxed. Even content. And the crow's-feet at the corners of her eyes softened.

She obviously liked prospecting with him on the rocky ridges and in the canyons up behind the camp, and often brought him rocks to identify.

"Why, that's leverite, Wilma," Murphey said the first time she handed him a chunk of country rock. "Leave-her-right where you found it."

She looked perplexed for a moment, then she poked him in the ribs and laughed loudly at the joke. At the end of a day they'd walk down the canyon to the shack, Murphey talking up a storm, Wilma smiling.

One day she stayed in camp. Murphey returned to find she had outlined the area around the front of the shack and the fire pit with small stones.

"Now we have a living room and a dining room, Murph," she said with a laugh.

The prospector couldn't help but notice when she moved around the campfire that evening to sit beside him while they ate. He felt uncomfortable when she moved in that close to him. Murphey had always been free to wander, never tied down to commitments or obligations.

Wilma shared Murphey's meals for nearly two weeks. Beans and rice. The desert man shot two jackrabbits out on the flats early one morning. The meat was tough and stringy, but it broke the monotony of beans and rice.

One evening after supper a soft breeze drifted gently down the canyon. Wilma jumped up and held out her hand to the prospector. "Murph," she said, "take me up the canyon to the place you can hear music. I want to hear music tonight. The 'Blue Danube' waltz."

"Ah, Wilma. That's just my imagination."

"I have an imagination, too. I want to see the bats fly and hear music."

"I thought you hated bats."

"That was before I understood them. Come on." She wiggled her fingers.

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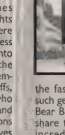

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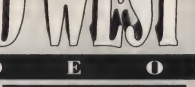

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"Oh, all right." Murphey heaved himself to his feet.

Together they walked a few hundred feet to a narrow opening where cliffs shouldered in on each side of the dry wash. They turned to watch the sun set. Bats flitted overhead.

Murphey reached out and put an arm around Wilma's narrow shoulders. It seemed the natural thing to do. He felt her hand around his waist. The breeze had died, leaving the evening air dead calm.

"Do you hear a waltz?" Murphey asked.

Wilma shook her head, which now rested on his shoulder.

"No, Murph. I don't."

"Me, neither. I reckon it takes a bit of a breeze."

Wilma didn't reply.

The sun disappeared behind the Shadow Mountains, far across the flats.

The pair stood with their arms around each other. Murphey didn't know how long they remained that way, no more than a minute or two, before he realized he was holding a commitment in his brawny arm. He stiffened.

Wilma raised her head from his shoulder.

"Is something wrong, Murph?"

The prospector stepped away from the woman. "No. Nothing's wrong. It's just that rattlesnakes come out in the cool of the evening. We'd better be getting back to camp."

Murphey avoided looking at Wilma while he cracked some branches over one knee and fiddled with the fire. Wilma stood on the opposite side of the fire pit, saying nothing. In silence they watched the branches smolder, then burst into flame.

Murphey took a deep breath. "Well, I reckon it's time to hit the hay," he said.

Wilma looked across the flames at Murphey. Shadows danced on her face. The look was questioning.

Murphey realized she had misunderstood the meaning of his statement. He stepped back. He knew he should say something. Say it quickly. Say it now. For the first time in his life, he was at a loss for words.

Wilma's expression changed. Her shoulders slumped.

Murphey felt like he had been slugged in the stomach. He looked closely into Wilma's face and tried to read a hidden meaning behind her words.

"Yes, I guess it's time to sleep," she said.

She turned and walked into the darkness of the shack.

The door closed slowly.

The prospector slammed his fist into the palm of his other hand. He cursed himself for being stupid.

He started around the fire pit.

Took a step toward the shack.

Stopped.

Instead, he moved to the blanket roll beside the flivver, stretched out on the canvas cover, and stared up at the stars. Wilma was lying in his bed in the shack. She would be thinking about him—thinking the same thoughts as his. He considered crossing the space between his blanket roll and the shack. Tapping on the door. It was no more than twenty feet over there. But deep down inside, Murphey knew the distance between the two beds was much more than twenty feet.

"Rise and shine, Murph."

Murphey screwed open his eyes and peered over the top of his blankets. The sky was yet dark. Wilma stood beside a crackling fire, smiling. "Come on, Murph. Time to get out of bed," she said.

Murphey grunted as he threw back the blankets and pulled on his clodhoppers. He tucked in his shirttail, combed his fingers through his hair, and shuffled over to stand beside the fire. Wilma was spooning beans and rice onto two plates. He wondered why she was wearing her white blouse and brown skirt.

"Morning," he said. "What you doing up so early?"

Wilma held out a plate to the prospector. "No offense, Murph, but I'm getting tired of eating beans and rice." She patted her stomach. "This old gal has had just about all the beans she can handle for a while. It's time to be moving on up to Las Vegas, where I can get a square meal of fried eggs and bacon and toast and coffee. Maybe even some orange juice."

Murphey felt like he had been slugged in the stomach. He looked closely into Wilma's face and tried to read a hidden meaning behind her words. He failed. She appeared to be happy, even jaunty, as she mashed the beans on her plate with the back of her spoon.

"Look, Wilma, about last night—"

"Don't give last night another thought, Murph," she said. "We were just a couple of old coots trying to be young again. I have to laugh every time I think of us mooning over there by the cliffs. It's been fun, Murph, staying here with you. I appreciate you taking me in like I was some stray puppy.

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And I'd appreciate it if you'd carry my suitcase down to the highway. I plan to catch a ride to Vegas with some early morning trucker."

"You can't just hitch a ride with some galoot you don't know."

"Why not?"

"It ain't safe. That's why."

Wilma laughed. "Murph, believe me. If there's one thing I know, it's men. I'll be safe." Her spoon scraped the plate.

"Now, wait a minute, Wilma. Let's talk about this. I've got an idea. You want to get on up to Vegas. Let me take you there."

"How? We've been waiting two weeks for one of your desert cronies to show up with some gasoline. We might wait here another month."

"I'll get some gas. Today. This is Tuesday, ain't it? Every Monday night Jake drives down to Barstow for the week's supplies. He don't get back to Clark Mountain much before the middle of the morning on Tuesdays. While he's gone I'll go down to the station and borrow a couple of gallons of gas."

"You'll steal gasoline? Doesn't he lock the gas pumps when he leaves?"

"He's only got one gas pump. He does padlock it, but I've got a hacksaw. It won't exactly be stealing. I'll pay him for the gas after I sell this load of tungsten to the mill. That way I can drive you right to your sister's house. I'll know you're safe. You've come to mean a lot to me, Wilma. You've got to let me do that much for you."

"You'll get in trouble if you're caught stealing."

"No, I won't. I won't get caught."

Wilma shook her head. "I don't know. For one thing, I don't have my sister's address, just her phone number. If I was to let you drive me into Las Vegas, would you drop me off at a public phone in the center of town?"

"Why?"

Wilma moved partway around the fire. She reached out and touched his shoulder. "I want to say good-bye to you in private, Murph. Not in front of my sister. Her husband's got a car. It won't be any bother for her to pick me up. Do you promise?"

CUTTING THE PADLOCK WENT SLOWLY. EVERY TIME A TRUCK OR CAR CAME INTO SIGHT, WILMA AND MURPHEY SCURRIED TO HIDE BEHIND THE STATION.

Murphey felt the touch of her fingers on his arm. He remembered the feel of her arm around his waist the previous evening. He was losing Wilma and didn't know what to do except to agree with her.

"If that's what you want," he said. "You stay here. I'll be back with the gas in just a couple of hours."

"I'm going with you," Wilma said. "I want to be there if you should get into trouble because of me."

An hour later Murphey and Wilma stepped onto the graded dirt highway, looked in both directions, then hurried across to a tall gas pump that stood in front of Clark Mountain Station. The wayside store was a small, low building made of sun-bleached boards. A hand-scrawled sign in one dirty window declared: NO FREE WATER. Murphey carried a red five-gallon gas can and a hacksaw. Wilma was again dressed in the prospector's pants and shirt.

"Jake's gone," Murphey said. "His truck's not here."

They stopped beside the pump. It was a good foot taller than Murphey. An empty glass cylinder at the top of the pump was calibrated to hold ten gallons of gasoline. A long lever extended up from the pump base to manually pump gasoline into the cylinder. Gravity allowed gasoline to flow out of the cylinder through a hose and nozzle. The lever's handle was clamped to the side of the pump with a brass padlock.

Murphey motioned with his head. "You watch for traffic. I'll have this padlock cut in jig time."

"Are you sure the owner won't be back before the middle of the morning? I feel funny, standing out here in the open, stealing gasoline."

"Nah. We've got plenty of time." Murphey started sawing at the hasp of the padlock.

"There's a truck or a car coming."

"Where?"

"From the top of the pass."

Murphey looked north toward a saddle in the Mescal Range. A cloud of dust ballooned above the highway.

"Tell me when it gets a mite closer," he said. "We'll just edge around to the back of the station until it goes by."

"There's a car coming from the other direction. Do you suppose that's the owner?"

At least two miles out on the flats was another cloud of dust. Murphey sawed faster. Suddenly the thin hacksaw blade snapped.

"Oh, hell!" Murphey said.

"What?"

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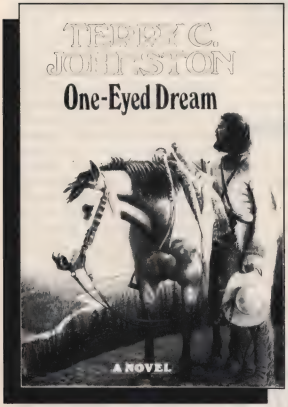

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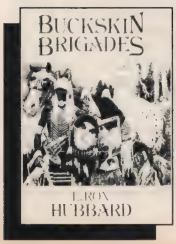

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"Just talking to myself. We'd better get outta sight until those jaspers get on by."

Murphey picked up the broken pieces of saw blade and the gas can. He and Wilma went around to the back side of the building, where they crouched close to the wall.

"I don't like this," Wilma said. "I feel like a thief. I am a thief."

Murphey studied the empty hacksaw frame.

"Let's go back to your house," Wilma said. She hadn't noticed the broken saw blade. "I'll change my clothes. You carry my suitcase down here to the highway. I'll get a ride into Las Vegas. I'll be okay, Murph. That's better than going to jail for stealing."

Murphey was thinking about the broken hacksaw blade. Without the saw blade he couldn't cut the lock and fill his gas can. Without gas he had no way of keeping Wilma from leaving within the next couple of hours. He considered breaking into the station—Jake kept a supply of hacksaw blades in the place. But breaking into Clark Mountain Station would be a serious offense, not a petty crime like swiping a few gallons of gas. And Wilma was already nervous about cutting the padlock. She wouldn't allow him to break into the building. More important, he didn't want her to become involved in a crime that serious. Murphey had to get gas, and get it quickly. Jake just might drive up the highway at any moment. In fact, that might be his truck out on the flats.

There hadn't been many times in Murphey's life when he had been forced to solve a problem quickly. Usually he had days, even weeks, to make up his mind about leaving a roustabout job, or abandoning a mining claim and moving on to prospect in another part of the desert. Now the desert man had to solve a problem quickly, or lose something he had decided he cherished: Wilma.

Murphey reasoned he could talk her into staying longer at the claim if he could manage to keep her there just one more day and night. Even that thought confused the prospector. He wanted Wilma to stay with him, yet he didn't want the responsibilities he knew would be involved in such a relationship.

MURPHEY WONDERED HOW HE WAS GOING TO TELL WILMA THAT HE HAD BROKEN THE ONLY HACKSAW BLADE HE OWNED.

"They're gone, Murph. Both of them. I don't hear any cars now. If you're going to get the gasoline, let's do it and get out of here."

Murphey wondered how he was going to tell Wilma he had broken the only hacksaw blade he owned. He looked at the dry gully behind the station. It was a dump for trash from the station: ruined tire casings, brass head gaskets, empty bottles and rusting cans, burnt transmission bands, broken tools.

Broken tools! There must be worn hacksaw blades among the trash that Jake had thrown away. Even a worn hacksaw blade would cut through the brass padlock on the gas pump. Quickly he explained the problem and possible solution to Wilma. She frowned but agreed to help him search the trash pile. They dropped into the gully and began pawing through the oil-soaked debris. Whenever a car or truck passed on the highway, the pair hunkered down out of sight below the rim of the gully.

The sun climbed higher in a cloudless sky. Trash lay scattered across the floor of the gully where Murphey and Wilma had thrown it. Perspiration dripped off the end of Murphey's nose. Time was passing quickly. He felt the pulse pounding in his neck. Jake would be returning soon. Or Wilma would call it quits. Murphey glanced at her. Old motor oil covered her arms to her elbows and smudged her forehead. He had to admire her for making a gallant effort to find a saw blade.

Now Murphey realized he had to protect Wilma, even if it meant losing her. The prospector had never felt obligated to protect anyone in his entire life.

"It's time to leave, Wilma. Jake will be here any minute."

Wilma straightened up stiffly. She looked up at the sun, then out over the flats.

"The road's empty," she said. "Just a few more minutes, Murph."

Murphey shook his head. "No. It ain't no use. Let's go back to the claim. You can get cleaned up, then I'll bring your suitcase back to the highway. I'll stay with you to make sure you get a ride with someone decent. Maybe a family headed for Salt Lake."

They climbed out of the gully and walked to the back of the building where Murphey had left the red gas can. He stooped to pick up the can and saw the broken pieces of hacksaw blade on the ground beside it. One of the fragments was as long as his hand.

"Wait a minute, Wilma. I got me an idea." He showed her the piece of saw blade. "I think maybe I can hold this in my hand to saw through that lock."

"Cutting the padlock with that little piece of blade will take a long time, won't it? And you might cut your hand."

"Don't you worry none about my hand. It's tough as rawhide."

"More cars are coming along the road now, Murph. Someone might recognize you. And what about the station owner? He could be here any minute. You shouldn't take the chance, Murph. Not for me."

"Wilma, I'd take any chance to keep you here a few hours longer."

"You're really trying, aren't you, Murph?"

"You bet. Why not?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just that you seem different today."

"Different from what? Different from last night? I hope to kiss a cat I'm different from last night. I was a fool last night," Murphey said. "I want you to stay at the claim, Wilma. Stay with me."

"That almost sounds like a proposal of marriage."

"I guess it is, sorta."

A smile crossed Wilma's lips. "Sorta what, Murph?"

"It is . . . well . . . yes, it is a proposal. By golly, will you marry me, Wilma?"

Now that the words were spoken, Murphey felt relieved—no, more than relieved. Murphey felt elated.

Wilma frowned. She studied the desert man. "We'll see," she said. "We'll see."

Her expression changed. She grinned. "Whatever happens, I'm tired of eating beans and rice. Let's get some gasoline in that jalopy of yours so we can go to town."

"You dang betcha! Come on."

Murphey put his arm around Wilma's waist as they walked around the station to the gas pump. His forearm was streaked with motor oil, and she was wearing his plaid town shirt. Murphey didn't care if the oil did stain his best shirt.

Cutting the padlock went slowly. Every time a truck or car came into sight, Wilma and Murphey scurried to hide behind the station. The fragment of hacksaw blade snapped once again. Murphey sawed at the padlock with a piece of blade only as long as his fingers.

Wilma shaded her eyes with one hand as she looked down the highway. "What color did you say the owner's truck is?"

Murphey clenched his teeth, sawed faster. "It's a blue Reo."

"I think he's coming now."

"I'm almost finished. Just a couple more seconds. Ah! There it is!" Murphey wrenched the padlock off the pump.

Wilma clutched his arm. "It's too late. That is a blue truck. We've got to get away from here. Come on, Murph. Forget the gasoline."

Murphey pumped the long handle back and forth. Red liquid splashed into the glass cylinder atop the pump.

MURPHEY PUT HIS ARM AROUND WILMA'S WAIST AS THEY WALKED AROUND THE STATION TO THE GAS PUMP.

"Just a couple of gallons is all I need. That's enough to get me to Ike's station at Wheaton Springs, on the other side of the pass."

"Murphey!" Wilma's voice sounded frantic. "Come on!" She pulled at his arm.

A truck was less than half a mile down the highway. Murphey recognized Jake's blue Reo. He pulled Wilma around behind the gas pump and knelt on one knee.

"Get down, Wilma. Beside me."

He thrust the hose nozzle into his gas can and squeezed the handle. Gas splashed into the can.

"Murphey!" Wilma cried. "It's too late!"

Without warning a southbound truck rattled past the station. A cloud of dust billowed over the prospector and the woman.

"Let's go," Murphey said.

"Where? We can't go across the highway, right in front of the owner."

"Around in back. Into the dry wash."

The couple hunched over as they ran around the station and jumped into the gully. Murphey heard Jake's Reo skid to a stop in the gravel in front of the station. A truck door slammed.

"Where do we go now?" Wilma whispered.

Murphey looked around. "Up the wash. Stay low so Jake don't see you."

He bent over and started up the gully. Wilma followed. They hadn't gone more than a hundred yards when the gully twisted toward the highway and became shallow.

"Lie down," Murphey said. "Quick. Jake can see us if he looks this way."

He felt trapped. They couldn't go back past the station and out onto the flats where the gully was deeper. And the next passing driver was bound to notice two people lying in a shallow wash beside the highway.

Wilma looked toward the station before she flattened out beside Murphey on the warm sand. She started laughing.

Murphey frowned. "What're you laughing about?"

"Us. Look at us, Murph. We're all dirty with oil and sand. We're trying to hide in this ditch right next to the road like a couple of

idiots. We're two grown-ups acting like a couple of kids who got caught stealing apples."

The prospector took off his hat and scratched his head. "By golly, you're right. What can old Jake do to us for taking two gallons of his high-priced gas? Shoot, everybody around these parts knows the old skinflint's been stealing from every poor pilgrim that has to pay his jacked-up price. Come to think of it, Jake owes me this gas from the times I had to pay him thirty cents a gallon."

He climbed to his feet and held his hand out to Wilma. "Come on, Wilma. You and me'll just walk right acrost the road and back to the claim. Let old Jake do what he wants. He can't even prove we took his gas. The sheriff sure ain't gonna send a deputy all the way out here from San Bernardino for sixty cents' worth of gas and a busted padlock."

Wilma reached up for Murphey's hand. "Maybe we should walk down the highway to your road, just to show Jake we don't care what he does."

Murphey considered the suggestion, rejected it. "No use baiting a badger," he said. "We got the gas. That's enough."

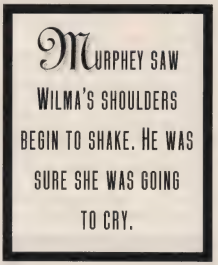
However, he watched the station as they crossed the highway and walked into a thicket of brush and cactus.

Wilma stayed in camp to get cleaned up while Murphey drove the pickup load of ore to the mill at the top of the pass. The ore was assayed and weighed, then the prospector was paid. With money in his wallet he wheeled down the north side of the pass to Ike's Wheaton Springs Station. The small, weatherbeaten building was similar in appearance to Clark Mountain Station. The Wheaton Springs Station also stocked a supply of basic foods, mostly for prospectors.

Murphey had lifted the seat on the Model T and was shoving the pump nozzle into the flivver's gas tank when Ike wandered out of the building. Ike was a tall, lanky, friendly man with horse teeth who had come to the desert from Arkansas several years earlier. He began pumping the long lever on the side of the gas pump.

"Howdy, Murphey. How much gas you want?"

"Five gallons," Murphey said.



"You got any good grub in stock?"

"The usual. Canned stuff. Dried stuff. I hope you got money to pay for this gas, Murphey. I can't afford to carry you on the books no more."

"I got money." Murphey patted his hip pocket. "Just sold a load of ore to the mill. You happen to have any fresh meat?"

Ike snickered. "You know I ain't got no ice out here."

"I was looking for something special."

"There's some sardines in mustard sauce on the top shelf."

Murphey walked toward the front door of the little store. "I'll take two cans," he called over his shoulder. "And some other things."

He stopped and turned around. "Would you do me a favor, Ike? Take the bulbs outta my head lamps while I'm picking up supplies."

"Them bulbs burned out? You want 'em replaced?"

"No. Just take them out. Put the bulbs in the toolbox behind the seat."

"That don't make no sense, Murphey," Ike said.

"It does today," Murphey said.

Murphey saw Wilma sitting on her suitcase in the shade of the juniper tree when he drove into camp late that afternoon. She had washed the oil from her arms, combed her hair, and was wearing her white blouse and brown skirt. The prospector switched off the engine.

"You look mighty pretty," he said.

Wilma didn't smile. "I've been waiting for you. All afternoon," she said.

Murphey stepped out of the truck. "They don't pay at the mill until they run an assay. I told them fellers to hurry. It didn't do no good. About that question I asked you—"

"Can we go now?" Wilma said. "I'm anxious to get on to my sister's place." She picked up her suitcase and started toward the pickup.

Murphey scratched the back of his head. The black Stetson skidded down over his left eyebrow. "We got us a little problem. This old Tin Lizzie's got no lights. I never needed them before. Always traveled in daylight. It'll be dark before we make Las Vegas."

Wilma stopped, almost in midstep. "Do you mean to tell me that we can't leave now—after all the trouble we had getting gasoline this morning?"

She dropped the suitcase, threw up both hands in a gesture of angry despair.

Murphey started toward Wilma, stopped. "Now, hold your horses, Wilma," he said. "I know you wanted to get to Las Vegas tonight. And I tried my best to

hurry. Believe me, I did. So I done the next best thing."

Wilma planted her fists on her hips. "What? Tell me, what did you do?"

"I know you're sick of eating beans and rice," the prospector said, "so as soon as I seen it was getting late I stopped at Ike's station and got us some good grub. Canned tomatoes, canned corn, canned peaches, real coffee, the makings for biscuits, and molasses. Even got sardines in mustard sauce."

Wilma flopped down on her suitcase and cradled her face in her cupped hands. "I don't believe this," she said. "I simply don't believe this is happening to me. On top of everything else—sardines in mustard sauce."

Murphey saw Wilma's shoulders begin to shake. He was sure she was crying. He hadn't expected Wilma to start crying. Not Wilma.

He spoke quickly. "I can fix it, Wilma. Fix the lights."

Wilma lifted her head. She wasn't crying, she was laughing. And she hadn't heard his offer to fix the car lights.

"Murph. Murphey. I don't know what I'm going to do with you," she said.

"You're not mad?"

"Of course I'm mad, you big bum. Do you think I like sitting here in the heat all afternoon, letting the flies bite me?"

She stood up and walked past Murphey to look into the pickup. "You said you have some food here. Peaches. I want some of those right now. Then let's build up the fire and have our first real meal."

The sun was balanced on the rim of the Shadow Mountains when Murphey mopped his plate with the last biscuit out of the Dutch oven.

Wilma drained the coffee in her tin cup and sighed. "That was a good meal. I even liked the sardines."

"We won't do dishes tonight," Murphey said. "Let the coyotes fight over the leavings."

Once again it was the quiet time of day. Shadows stretched long from the Joshua trees below the camp. It was the gentle time of day, with cool evening air drifting slowly down the canyon and fanning out across the flats. It would be the lonesome time of day, if a

WILMA BEGAN HUMMING AS SHE WALTZED IN CIRCLES AROUND THE PROSPECTOR.

man was sitting in the vastness of that desert all by himself.

"I've been thinking," Murphey said. "This ain't no life for a lady like you, Wilma. Living in a sheet iron shack. Cooking over a fire. You deserve a real house with piped-in water, an inside toilet, good furniture. We can move into town. I can find a job working in a railroad roundhouse or roughnecking in construction. I'm a top-notch powder man. There's talk the government is gonna build a big dam east of Las Vegas, over in the Black Canyon. They'll need experienced powder men like me."

Wilma leaned back to look up at a sky that was turning from blue to yellowish pink. She held out her hand. "Help me up, please," she said.

Murphey scrambled to his feet and pulled Wilma up beside him.

"Let's take a walk, Murph. Over to where the canyon narrows."

The couple walked away from the camp, away from the dying cooking fire and the rusty sheet iron shack and the battered Model T pickup without bulbs in the headlamps.

Wilma took hold of Murphey's arm and snuggled close to him. "I've loved being here, Murph. Being here with you. There was a time I didn't think this kind of life was possible for me."

"Does that mean you'll marry me?"

"I don't want to talk right now," Wilma said. "I just want to enjoy the evening."

She stopped in the gap where cliffs narrowed in on both sides of the canyon, turned to face the setting sun, and once again leaned her head on Murphey's big shoulder. Overhead, tiny bats flitted in the evening sky. A slight breeze sliding through the gap rustled dry leaves on some buckbrush.

"Do you hear it, Murphey?" A faraway look was in her eyes.

"Hear what?"

Wilma pulled away from him, held her arms out from her sides, and started gliding in graceful circles on the packed sand of the wash.

"The waltz," she said.

She closed her eyes as she danced.

"The 'Blue Danube' waltz. Don't you hear it, Murphey?"

Murphey was puzzled at first. He had never seen Wilma act this way. He felt strangely uncomfortable, as if he were intruding on the private thoughts of this woman he had come to admire and like, maybe to love. Murphey wasn't exactly sure how a person in love is supposed to feel.

Wilma began humming as she waltzed in circles around the prospector. Murphey imagined he heard the faint melody of the "Blue Danube" waltz from the woman, and from the evening breeze. He remembered his mother sitting at the parlor pump organ, her back straight, her

chestnut hair pinned high on her head, her long fingers trailing across the ivory keyboard. The melody became louder in Murphey's mind. He pictured his father entering the parlor. The man was tall and lean, with wavy hair and a mustache. He was dressed as usual in an immaculate brown wool suit. He walked across the room to stand behind the woman. She stopped moving her hands across the white keys, yet the music continued, soft and gentle, like an evening breeze. The couple waltzed around the parlor to a melody heard only by themselves—and by a small boy.

"Waltz with me, Murphey." She paused in front of the prospector.

Murphey stepped into the woman's arms. At first his feet were clumsy, the big clodhoppers scuffing the sand of the wash. Gradually, guided by pressure from Wilma's hands and by increasingly loud music from the pump organ, his feet and legs and body responded to the smooth rhythm of the waltz. Around and around on the packed sand of the desert wash the couple danced.

"Will you marry me, Wilma?"

Even to Murphey, his voice seemed to come from another person.

Wilma's eyes opened. "I would like to marry you, Murphey." Her voice was low and soft. "Living with you would be the dream of my life. But it wouldn't be right."

"Wilma—"

She touched his lips with her forefinger. "Shh. Don't talk. Keep waltzing. I can't marry you, Murphey. You're a desert man. I'm a town woman. You'll always wonder what's on the other side of a range of mountains. I always wanted a home and respectability in a community. Soon, you'd hate me. Or I'd hate you. Tonight is special, though. Tonight we share an experience that not many men or women can imagine. It's an experience we'll remember with both happiness and sadness for the rest of our lives."

Wilma leaned back in Murphey's arms as they twirled. "Look up there, Murphey. Look at the little bats up in the sunlight."

Murphey struggled to unravel conflicting emotions. Deep in his chest he felt the stabbing pain of bitter disappointment. At the same time, he was lifted on a wave of relief.

"I don't see no bats," he said. His voice was hoarse. "There ain't no bats."

Around and around they waltzed.

"We've no right to be this happy, Murph. You know that. Two old stiffs like us. Or, maybe everyone has a right to be happy just one night in their lives. Do you suppose that's it, Murph? Is this our night to be happy? Yours and mine?"

"Maybe so. I know I'm happy right now with you in my arms."

"Murphey, just for tonight let's pretend we're man and wife. You and me."

"We're not pretending, Wilma. Not tonight."

The strains of the "Blue Danube" waltz resounded down the canyon, music from a parlor pump organ at first, with all the stops pulled out, then joined by a symphony of strings and brass. The music echoed between limestone and granite cliffs. It rolled out across the desert flats, out to the Shadow Mountains and back. The sound frightened the little bats.

Darkness settled into the desert canyon. Two people waltzed in dreams that were not dreams. The man wore an immaculate brown wool suit. Soft leather boots polished to a high sheen graced his feet. He and the woman in his arms waltzed on an Oriental rug in a familiar parlor. The woman's silk evening gown brushed a polished oak floor. She looked up at evening stars that became a crystal chandelier in the crowded ballroom of her hilltop home, a home high above the cold-water flat near a corner saloon in a grubby mill town.

Little rock bats flitted overhead. ■

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SHOWDOWN AT CARSON CITY

Dan Stuart was sweating.

A big, burly Texan with a great, curling handlebar mustache, there was not much that could make him perspire. It had happened to him once in a knife fight in Galveston; and once up in the Yukon—a narrow escape from a drunken lynch mob that had mistaken him for someone else; and then there had been that widow named Clarabelle in Memphis. She had made him perspire—and very well, too. But normally the only thing that caused Dan Stuart to break sweat was the prospect of losing large amounts of money. That would do it every time. He was in Carson City, Nevada,

BY

CLARK HOWARD

What Reinhold Sadler decided in the next few minutes would make Dan Stuart wealthy—or it would bankrupt him.

in the state capitol building, sitting in a fine leather chair, facing the desk of a somber looking, balding man with bushy white eyebrows over the levelest gaze Dan Stuart had ever seen on a man not wearing a gun. What this man decided in the next few minutes would make Dan Stuart wealthy—or bankrupt him.

The man's name was Reinhold Sadler. He was governor of the sovereign state of Nevada, which was then, in that year of 1897, a mere thirty-two years old.

"You've taken this proposal to the governor of Texas?" Sadler asked.

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Stuart.

"And to the governor of Arkansas?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they both turned you down?"

"They did, sir, yes." *The lily-livered bastards,* he thought.

"Why?" Sadler asked. He pointed a warning finger. "I want a straight answer now."

"In Texas," Stuart said, "There's legislation pending to ban prizefighting altogether. It was felt that bringing the fight there would create too many political fireworks. And in Arkansas—well, sir, just let me say that the governor there is a lay Baptist preacher, a teetotaler, a lifelong bachelor, and has a singing canary for a pet. It goes without saying that he is personally opposed to prizefighting."

"Well, why bring the offer all the way out here?" the Nevada governor asked. "What's the matter with Oklahoma? Missouri? Colorado?"

"I decided," Dan Stuart said, "that I needed a state that still had some vigor, some backbone, some pioneer spirit."

"And a lot of miners with gold and silver in their pockets?"

"That is a definite asset, sir, yes. There's also the fact that you have a direct railroad line from San Francisco to the west and Denver to the east."

Governor Sadler sat back and fixed his penetrating gaze on the Texan. "This fight, is it legitimate?"

"Oh, indeed it is, sir!" Stuart asserted. "It'll be a grand battle, it will." Dan Stuart's eyes twinkled at the prospect. "For the heavyweight championship of the world, Governor. The champion is none other than Gentleman Jim Corbett himself, the conqueror of the great John L. Sullivan, and the finest boxer ever to enter a ring. And the challenger is Robert Fitzsimmons—Ruby Bob himself—who some say may be the hardest puncher ever. Oh, yes, sir, it's a legitimate fight, all right. It's the kind of fight a promoter such as myself dreams about. I've put my last dime and everything I own into it, sir."

"And now," Sadler reminded him quietly, "you stand to lose it all unless you can secure a site for the event by midnight tonight."

"That's the sad, terrible truth of it," Stuart admitted. "The fighters have been in training for the match for three months, but unless I have a guaranteed site by the end of this day, all contracts are off." Under his tailored day coat, Stuart's shirt was plastered to his chest and back, soaked through. "That's why, sir," he decided to take a risky chance, "I was thinking of taking on a partner, a silent partner, someone who might be in a position to—"

"Stop right there!" Sadler ordered, raising his hand, palm out. "Don't say another word. If you were to offer to make me a partner in this promotion in return for me allowing this fight to be staged in Nevada, I would have to construe it as an attempted bribe and have you thrown out. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"No, sir," Dan Stuart said in embarrassment, looking down at his big hands. "I beg your pardon, sir. But you are looking at a desperate man."

"I understand desperation, Mr. Stuart," the governor said. "I've been desperate a time or two myself, in the political arena; during a campaign, for instance, when funds run out." Reinhold Sadler wrote a name and address on a slip of paper and pushed it across the desk. "This is my campaign finance chairman; I don't personally participate in fund-raising myself—ethics, you understand."

"Oh, I do understand, sir." Dan Stuart stopped sweating. "I do, indeed."

Reinhold Sadler smiled. "Provided that my finance chairman approves, I'll let you hold your fight right here in Carson City. With only one condition: you must provide, at your expense, extra policemen. I know the event will attract a large number of people, of all sorts; our streets must be kept peaceful."

Bat Masterson couldn't resist the lure of free flowing whiskey, high stakes gambling, and fast women.

"Oh, they will be, Governor," Dan Stuart assured him. "You have my word on it, sir."

When Bat Masterson returned to his Denver office after lunch, Miss Daisy Phelps, his pretty young secretary, immediately said, "There's a wire on your desk; it was just delivered."

"Oh?" Bat's eyebrows rose. Masterson Private Security received much mail but few wires. Hanging his cane, overcoat, and gray derby on a rack, he walked with a slight limp over to the desk and picked up the telegram. It read:

CORBETT-FITZSIMMONS TITLE FIGHT SET HERE FOR MARCH 17TH STOP AM AUTHORIZED TO HIRE YOU PLUS TWELVE MEN AS SPECIAL DEPUTIES FOR TEN-DAY PERIOD PRIOR TO FIGHT STOP ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS PER DAY FOR YOU, FIFTY FOR EACH OF YOUR MEN STOP CAN YOU ACCEPT STOP

It was signed: Edward H. Kenney, Chief of Police, Carson City, Nevada.

A slight smile crossed Bat's lips. Corbett and *Fitzsimmons*, he thought. Now there was a mismatch. Gentleman Jim would knock out the skinny Australian in a couple of rounds. As for the job of keeping the peace in Carson City—well, that would be a cakewalk after Dodge City and some others he'd seen. But there would be drinking and gambling aplenty, and probably some fine-looking women over from San Francisco. It had the makings of a good time all around.

"Wire Chief Kenney that I accept," he instructed Miss Phelps.

"But Mr. Masterson," she protested, "your leg—"

"My leg's strong enough for a job like this," he said.

"You can't even sit a horse without pain and you know it," she rebuked. "Let one of the others go in your place." Miss Phelps put a hand on her employer's arm, in a not unfamiliar gesture. "Please, Bat."

He patted the young woman's hand and smiled. "It'll be all right, Daisy, really. Go ahead and send the wire." Gently he nudged the young woman toward the coat-rack for her walk down the street to Western Union.

Daisy was twenty, pretty as a cover on *Collier's Weekly*, and a great comfort to a man of forty-four who still had a bit of lead in his pelvis from a long-ago fight. Any man with half a mind would have stayed right there in Denver to enjoy her worshipful attention on the cold winter nights. But not Bat. He couldn't resist the lure of free-flowing whiskey, high stakes gambling, and fast women.

And being the *law* again.

In San Francisco, Dan Stuart strode into the penthouse of the elegant Del Monte Hotel on Nob Hill and handed his silver-studded ten-gallon western hat to the butler.

"They're in the breakfast room, sir," the butler said.

Stuart marched out to a bright, sunlit room where three people were at a splendidly set breakfast table. "It's on," Stuart announced as he walked into the room. The three people looked up at him.

"When and where?" asked William A. Brady. He was the champion's manager, a shrewd individual who had guided Jim Corbett to his challenge of and victory over the great John L. Sullivan.

"Carson City, Nevada. Next month—March seventeenth."

Gentleman Jim Corbett smiled. "St. Patrick's Day. I like that, Dan." He rose to shake Dan Stuart's hand, a tall, handsome man, lustrous black hair combed straight back, immaculately groomed, dressed in a luxurious silk morning coat.

"Carson City, *Nevada?*" said the woman at the table. "Do they have decent accommodations there?" This was the champion's wife, Vera Stanhope Corbett, one of the great beauties of her day. A prominent San Francisco socialite, she had taught her husband, a former bank clerk, much of what had made him a gentleman.

"As a matter of fact, they have an elegant hostelry there called the Ormsby House," Stuart assured her. "I've already reserved the best suite there for you."

"Well, then," William Brady said, "it looks like we've got us a fight. But in a place like Carson City, we'll want some security at the training camp."

"I've already arranged that, too," Stuart said. "I've got a fellow who lives just across the bay in Concord; he referees for me now and again, but he used to be a lawman. You've probably heard of him. His name's Wyatt Earp."

Down the coast in the oceanside

s soon as the site of the big fight was publicized, Carson City started to fill up.

town of Monterey, Martin Julian, an agile little man with quick moves who had once been a circus acrobat, hurried into a little makeshift training camp, waving a telegram in one hand.

"It's set, Bobby!" he yelled. "Carson City, Nevada! On St. Paddy's Day next month!"

In a rickety ring made by local carpenters, with ordinary farm hawser for its ring ropes, a homely, freckle-faced man paused in his sparring. He had thinning red hair, spindly legs, and looked almost awkward when he moved. This was Robert "Ruby Bob" Fitzsimmons, called "Fitz" by his friends and supporters—the number one challenger for the heavyweight championship of the world. Smiling, he turned and whistled at Rose Julian Fitzsimmons, his wife and the sister of Martin Julian, who was his manager. "Rose, darlin', did you hear?"

"I heard, Bobby!" Rose yelled back. A plain woman of little formal education, she was standing at a table outside a cookhouse, kneading dough for her husband's supper biscuits, proud of the fact that he would eat no one's cooking in training camp but her own. Smiling now, she waved a dough-covered hand at the gangling man she adored. "You'll be the next champion, Bobby!"

Martin Julian climbed into the ring. "I'm making arrangements now for us to move camp to a place called Cook's Grove, three miles east of Carson City. And I'm going to hire a guard to keep Corbett and his people out."

"Is that necessary?" Fitz asked. "It's the custom in America for fighters to observe each other train."

"We won't be following that custom for this fight, Bobby," the little man said evenly. "Dan Stuart said in his telegram that Corbett was hiring Wyatt Earp for his camp."

"Earp!" Fitz's lips curled in a sneer. "That son of a bitch! You're right, then, Martin: we want none of Corbett's men in our camp—especially Earp!"

Martin and Fitz both hated Wyatt Earp. He had refereed a match between Fitz and contender Tom Sharkey at Mechanics Pavilion in San Francisco the previous year, and had called one of Fitz's body blows a foul, awarding the bout to Sharkey on a disqualification. It had almost cost Fitz the title fight with Corbett.

"Who are you going to hire?" the fighter asked.

"A friend of mine who has a traveling carnival in the Midwest recommended a fellow who calls himself Alexander Franklin," Julian said. "He lives back around St. Louis. Used to be an outlaw of some kind, but he's been pardoned and that life is behind him now. He travels with the carnival sometimes, but also hires out for this sort of thing now and again. My friend assured me he'll stand up to Earp or any other man. I've already sent for him."

As soon as the site of the big fight was publicized, Carson City started to fill up. Special trains began arriving every day on the spur line from Reno, which was a transcontinental stop. Pulling into Carson City late every afternoon, the "Fight Flyers," as they were called, brought in gamblers, gunmen, con men, hoboes, grifters, loafers, millionaires, showpeople, sportsmen, tycoons, and —as Bat Masterson had predicted to himself—women of every variety. The little Nevada capital quickly took on the atmosphere of a boom town in the goldfields.

Gentleman Jim Corbett and his entourage arrived amid great fanfare, to take up residence at the elegant Ormsby House while his training camp was being constructed at Shaw Springs, north of town. With the champion came his coterie of sparring partners, including one young giant whom everyone called "Big Jeff."

"We've got Big Jeff," manager Brady told the press, "because we know how hard Fitzsimmons punches. After the champion trains with this kid for a while, Fitzsimmons won't be able to hurt him with a sledgehammer. Not that we expect Fitzsimmons to ever *hit* Gentleman Jim, of course; the champion is much too fast for that."

Arriving to join the Corbett camp was Wyatt Earp and his wife, Josephine Sarah Marcus Earp, daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant in California, who had been disowned and disinherited by her father two decades earlier for, first, becoming a showgirl traveling the West, and second, marrying the notorious gunman Earp. Josie, as Wyatt called her, had been with Earp for fifteen years and never regretted a day of it. A strong-willed, independent woman, she was, at forty-one,

Alexander Franklin was vaguely familiar to a number of people already in town, but no one could put his face with the name.

sometimes all that Wyatt could handle. Wyatt himself, now forty-nine, had not been a lawman for many years, but made a comfortable living gambling, racing horses, and refereeing for various fight promoters. At the present, his reputation at the latter was under something of a cloud because of the Fitzsimmons-Sharkey fight the previous year. Because Fitzsimmons was such a heavy favorite, and because so much money was nevertheless bet on Sharkey, there had been rumors that the fight had been "fixed"—that Wyatt had been handsomely paid for disqualifying Ruby Bob. No one, of course, had accused him to his face.

On one of the trains from Reno, the man calling himself Alexander Franklin also arrived. A dark-eyed, unsmiling individual of perhaps fifty years, he was vaguely familiar to a number of people already in town, but no one could put his face with the name. Accompanying him was his wife, Annie "Franklin," who ironically had much in common with Josie Earp. The former Annie Ralston, daughter of a wealthy Missouri farmer, an expert horsewoman and revolver shot, had also been disowned by her family for marrying a man who was then a notorious outlaw. But like Josie, after twenty-five years together, Annie had never rued her decision. The Franklins checked into the Ormsby House, as the Earps had done.

Gentleman Jim Corbett, on arrival, had given an interview to the press in which he had openly scorned his less glamorous opponent's looks. Fitz, when told about it, had refused to comment in reply, but was reported to have scowled darkly. Now both fighters began their road work in and around Carson City. The townspeople watched them closely, wondering how long it would be until they encountered each other.

A young woman named Arizona Donnie Clark arrived from Salt Lake City with her two little boys in tow. She had left her poverty-stricken farmer husband, determined to make a better life for her two sons. On the recommendation of the baggage master at the depot, she went to the home of a black woman named Leona Clay, who ran a laundry business at her modest home on the edge of town.

"I was told you might keep my little boys for me while I look for work," the woman, who called herself "Arrie," said.

Leona, a tall, lithe woman with wide shoulders and café au lait skin, looked down at the two children. "They good boys?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," Arrie assured her. "Hermie here is going on four, but he can already look after little Lloyd, who's going on two." Arrie bit her lip. "I really need help. My money's almost run out and I've *got* to find a job—"

"Come on in, girl," Leona said.

A young man named Chester Gillette rolled off the rods of one of the incoming trains and wandered around Carson City, also looking for work. A thirteen-year-old runaway from Chicago, the boy could not stand his career Salvation Army parents and their lifestyle, and was determined not to become like them. At the Ormsby House, he fell in line with some others at a door with a "Now Hiring" sign above it. In line in front of him was Arrie Clark.

"I sure hope I can get a job," he said, striking up a conversation.

Arrie looked at him and frowned. "How old are you?" she asked.

"Sixteen," he lied. Arrie raised one eyebrow.

"You don't look sixteen."

"Well, I haven't eaten in two days," the boy explained.

"I don't think that's the reason," she said. It was almost her turn to go inside. From a meager number of coins in her purse, she gave him a dime. "This will at least get you a sandwich. Good luck."

"Hey, thanks! Good luck to you, too," Chester Gillette replied, smiling widely.

Soon Bat Masterson arrived with his cadre of heavily armed men. Curious townspeople gathered to watch them detrain. When Masterson stepped onto the platform in a fine black suit, wearing two silver pistols and carrying a silver cane, a murmur of admiration surged through the crowd. Wyatt and Josie Earp were there to meet him. The men shook hands vigorously, and Bat hugged Josie.

"Hellfire, it's good to see you two again!" Masterson roared. They all walked away from the depot together, Bat limping, his men following. "I was sorry to hear about Doc. What got him, his lungs or the liquor?" He was referring to Wyatt's good friend Doc

Holliday, who had passed away in a tuberculosis sanatorium.

Wyatt shrugged. "Both, I think. The liquor helped kill him, but it was his choice. Doc lived as he pleased." Changing the subject, Wyatt asked, "Bat, you ever hear of a gun hand out of Missouri named Alexander Franklin?"

"Name's not familiar. He ever badged?"

"Don't know. Don't know *anything* about him. He's with the Fitzsimmons bunch."

"Let me know if he gives you any trouble," Bat offered.

"I'll handle whatever comes up, Bat. Thanks anyway," Wyatt replied.

A rapierlike man of some seventy years, as finely dressed as Bat Masterson but less ostentatious, got off the same train that day. He had mischievous slate-gray eyes centered between pure white hair and a flowing white mustache. Carrying his grip satchel, he proceeded to the Ormsby House lobby.

"I have a suite reserved," he told the desk clerk, handing him an engraved card that read: CHARLES E. BOLTON.

As the elderly gentleman was registering, he was approached by Chief of Police Ed Kenney. "Are you Black Bart?" the lawman demanded, one hand on his gun.

Bolton looked at him disdainfully. "*Formerly* Black Bart, sir. If you'll check with San Quentin, you'll find that I have served my time and have been duly released. I am not a fugitive, nor am I wanted for any crimes. Now, if you will excuse me—"

"Just don't make no trouble in my town, Bart," Ed Kenney warned.

"*Any* trouble," Bolton corrected, picking up the key to his suite. "I don't intend to." He turned to the bellboy who had his bag. "All right, boy."

The bellboy was newly hired Chester Gillette, who led Bolton to his quarters.

The desk clerk, Leon Coleman, asked Ed Kenney who Black Bart was. "Stage robber," Kenney told him. "Held up Wells Fargo coaches all over California for damn near thirty years before he was caught. Used to take the money out of the strongboxes and put a poem in its place, then send the boxes back. Like to drove Wells Fargo crazy."

"I certainly hope there's no trouble in the hotel," Coleman said. Assuring him that there would not be, Kenney left. Coleman wiped his brow with a pocket handkerchief. He had his own reasons for wanting to avoid trouble. An anarchist, he was on the run from prosecution for his role in the Homestead, Pennsylvania, steel mill strike and riot five years earlier, in which six men were killed. *Coleman* was an alias for his real name of Czolgosz, which was Polish and pronounced "Cholgosh." A sensitive, sad-eyed young man, he was a loner with absolutely no friends.

In their respective camps, the two fighters pursued arduous training. They had not encountered each other during their roadwork, but the townspeople had not given up hope. Fitzsimmons lived at his camp and rarely made an appearance in town, except late in the afternoon on occasion when he came in with Rose to help her shop, dutifully carrying her parcels like any ordinary husband. Corbett, on the other hand, was seen about every night, playing billiards with Wyatt Earp at the Arlington House, where Masterson and his men were quartered, or dining sumptuously at the elegant Chez Paree French restaurant with the beautiful Vera.

Corbett talked to the press a lot, boasting of what he said were his obviously superior qualities when compared to his challenger. "I'll grant you that Ruby Bob can hit," the champion allowed, "but in order to do so he must have a stationary target. Look at the men he's beaten: Billy McCarthy, Art Upham, Peter Maher; slow as oxen, all of them. Joe Choynski held the man to a draw, while as everyone knows, I beat Choynski with one hand broken. No, gentlemen, Fitzsimmons isn't a *con*tender for my title, he's a *pre*tender. I'll dance circles around him and cut his homely face to ribbons. It won't be pretty—but then, neither is he!" Corbett roared laughter at his own humor.

Each day, while Rose prepared his supper, Fitz would read Corbett's new remarks in the *Carson City Appeal*, and each day he grew more solemn, and the next day he trained a little harder.

Arrie returned to the black laundress Leona Clay's home with a wide smile on her face. "I got a job, Leona! Dining room server at the Ormsby House! Now I can pay you to look after the boys. Were they good today?"

"I never seen two better little boys," Leona said. "They out back playing."

In the back yard, where Leona had three large wooden laundry tubs, Hermie and Lloyd were rolling a ball to each other. A muscular, dark man was bent over the rinsing tub, removing clothes and wringing them out with powerful

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A sudden rumor spread through Carson City like prairie fire: Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson were going to meet in the street at noon for a duel.

hands. "Oh," Arrie said, having not seen the man before. "Who's that?"

"I don't know his rightful name," Leona said. "He jus' say his name 'Kid.' He an Indian, but not one from around here." She glanced down. "We, uh—we be together, you know? But don't tell nobody. I don't want to lose no business; people is funny sometimes."

"Is he safe to have around?" Arrie asked quietly. "I mean, he looks so—angry."

"He don't look angry at night," Leona replied with a sly smile. "At night he only look happy."

Three weeks before the fight, a heavy snowstorm fell on the area and the Carson City valley became a white wonderland. For the two fighters it was a welcome interruption in the rigors of training. Corbett and Vera went sleighing about the countryside, fur robes on their laps, fine horses pulling their rig, looking like a couple on a picture postcard. Fitz and Rose were content to simply frolic in the snow like two youngsters, with Fitz's 182-pound black Danish mastiff joining in the fun. In town, Arrie helped her little boys build a snowman.

Then a sudden rumor spread through Carson City like a prairie fire: Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson were going to meet in the street at noon for a duel.

The townspeople were stunned. Weren't Earp and Masterson good friends? Perhaps—but each had confirmed to acquaintances that they wanted a showdown between them.

At noon, the wooden sidewalks were three deep with eager spectators. And at noon, the two former lawmen started toward each other from opposite ends of the street, their polished boots leaving tracks in the still falling snow. A great silence fell over the town as they approached to within a dozen feet of each other. Then Wyatt shouted, "Go!"

Immediately both men bent to scoop snow that they quickly rolled into snowballs, and began pelting each other. Onlookers at first stared in disbelief, then began to rock with laughter. For fifteen minutes, Earp and Masterson fought it out, then went staggering, gasping for breath, into the Four Star Saloon, where they proceeded to get roaring drunk. Josie Earp came in later and saw that they both got off to bed.

In a few days the snow was gone, and fight promoter Dan Stuart put one hundred men to work building the outdoor fight arena and its ring. Their saws and hammers and wood planes created a steady noise that rose from a clearing at the edge of town.

And the two fighters went back to training.

Off another train came a somber, beady-eyed man who dressed in funeral gray and never wore a necktie. As he registered at the Ormsby House, Earp and Masterson saw him from the smoking lounge, where they were enjoying cigars.

"By god, Wyatt, that's Dave Mather," said Bat. Wyatt squinted toward the newcomer.

"Damned if it isn't. What's a bounty hunter like Mysterious Dave doing in town?"

"I'd better see if he's aiming to start trouble," Bat said, rising. Wyatt automatically rose to back his friend. Bat intercepted Mysterious Dave Mather on the way to his room. "Hello, Dave."

Mather stopped and turned, his eyes flicking between the two men. "You and Earp the law here, Masterson?"

"Not Wyatt, just me. Keeping the peace until the big fight is over. You bounty hunting, Dave?"

"Maybe," Mather replied. "Is there a law against it?"

"No. Just don't start any gunplay or other trouble until the fight is over and I'm gone. Clear?"

"And if I do?"

"Then you'll answer to me for it," Bat said coldly.

Mysterious Dave Mather smiled a death mask smile. "Whatever you say, lawman." Then he went on his way, the bellhop Chester Gillette following with his bag.

In his room, Mather showed Chester a wanted poster for Zenogalache, also known as the Apache Kid. "This here Indian is wanted for murder down in New Mexico," he told young Chester. "He killed another Indian who had killed his father, then killed two white men who were taking him to Yuma Territorial Prison. I done tracked him up to here. You seen this face around town?"

"No, sir," Chester replied.

Black Bart went from bookmaker to bookmaker, placing bets on Gentleman Jim Corbett to win the title fight.

"If you do, boy, you let me know," Mather said. "I'll make it worth your while."

And Mr. Bat Masterson be damned, the bounty hunter thought.

Serving tables in the Ormsby House dining room one day at noon, Arrie was stunned to see Alexander Franklin and his wife Annie seated at one of her tables. As she tried to pour their coffee, Franklin noticed that her hands were trembling.

"What's the matter, young lady?" he asked.

"N–nothing at all, sir," Arrie replied. Franklin's eyes narrowed slightly.

"You recognize me, don't you?"

"Y–yes, sir," she admitted.

"From where?" he asked quietly.

"Carthage, Missouri, sir. When I was ten, you and your brother and your men rode through one day."

Before Franklin could speak again, Annie put a gentle hand on his and smiled up at the younger woman. "What is your name, dear?"

"Arrie Clark, ma'am."

"Well, Arrie, my husband and I are here incognito. Do you know what that means?"

"No, ma'am."

"It means we do not want anyone to know who we are. We are here as Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Franklin. Will you help us keep our little secret?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," Arrie assured.

From her purse, Annie took a twenty-dollar gold piece and pressed it into Arrie's hand.

"No, ma'am, I couldn't," Arrie protested. "Your husband is a hero where I'm from—"

"I insist," Annie Franklin said. "Please don't disappoint me."

"Well, thank you so much, Mrs.—Franklin." Arrie smiled shyly at the former outlaw. "Mr. Franklin, sir."

Alexander Franklin winked at her and said, "How about that coffee now, Arrie."

Charles Bolton, whom police chief Ed Kenney knew to be released stagecoach bandit Black Bart, began walking the streets of Carson City, going from bookmaker to bookmaker, placing bets on Gentleman Jim Corbett to win the upcoming title fight. Kenney, suspicious, followed him—surreptitiously, he thought, but the wily Bolton was aware of his surveillance.

The odds on Corbett successfully defending his championship were five-to-three. Bolton made his bets after assuring himself that the usual wagering proviso of the time was in effect. "This bet can be cancelled anytime up to twenty-four hours before the fight, is that correct?"

"Absolutely, sir," he was assured everywhere he went. "You're allowed to change your bet up to twelve noon on March sixteenth."

Bolton took the short end of the odds and bet heavily in gold.

Outside one bookmaker's establishment, Bolton waved across the street at the lawman following him. "Chief Kenney!" he called. "Come over and join me for a brandy!"

Warily, Ed Kenney approached and the two found a table at the Golden Nugget.

"You're wasting your time shadowing me, Chief," Bolton told Kenney when they were served.

"You're up to no good, I know it," Kenney countered.

"Not for a minute," Bolton denied. "I'm merely making honest bets on a prizefight."

"You're a paroled convict. Where'd you get the gold to bet?"

"I won't lie to you, Chief," Bolton replied candidly. "I robbed stagecoaches for thirty years. And for thirty years I buried a part of everything I stole. I've got gold buried all over northern California: a few thousand here, a few thousand there."

"Stolen money," Ed Kenney accused.

Bolton's expression clouded. "No. Money I earned. I paid for it with every day I spent in San Quentin. Want to see my back, Chief? I took the leather strap and I've the scars to prove it."

"I thought corporal punishment wasn't allowed at San Quentin," Kenney said, his voice now unsure.

"It isn't," Bolton said. "Unless crooked officials are trying to find hidden gold."

"I see." Ed Kenney looked down at the table with pursed lips for a moment. He was an honest public servant, but he knew there were those who were not, and he despised them. Lifting his snifter, he finished the brandy in it and rose. "Thank you for the drink, sir. Enjoy your visit to Carson City."

Franklin pulled back the frock coat he wore, revealing a pistol on his hip. "You'll not come in here," he said in clear challenge.

The Ormsby House desk clerk, who called himself Leon Coleman, had been watching Arrie Clark from the first day she was hired. He thought she was the loveliest young woman he had ever seen. After a week, he marshaled enough courage to speak to her.

"Excuse me, Miss Arrie, but there's a road show coming to town tomorrow—the New York Extravaganza Company. It will be playing at the Opera House. There's an eight-piece band in the troupe and a variety of stage acts. I was wondering if you'd do me the honor of accompanying me to it?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Coleman, I can't," Arrie responded. She had been aware of his observation of her, so the invitation was not altogether unexpected. "I have two little boys, you see, and I spend my evenings with them."

Having inquired about Arrie, the desk clerk knew she was not with her husband. "We can take your little boys along," he said. "It's advertised as family entertainment."

"Oh." That offer *was* unexpected. Most suitors she had encountered since leaving her husband wanted, first thing, to get her *away* from her children. "Well, in that case, I suppose —yes, we'd be pleased to attend, Mr. Coleman."

"Call me Leon, please—Arrie," the young anarchist fugitive said with a delighted expression. It was the first time he had smiled in many months.

Wyatt Earp and several gamblers he knew from California hired a buggy and drove out to Cook's Grove to watch Fitzsimmons train. They were stopped at the entrance to the camp by Alexander Franklin.

"You're not welcome here, Mr. Earp," he said levelly. "You other gentlemen may go in if you like."

Wyatt Earp froze like a man suddenly paralyzed, his face darkening with unveiled anger. "I go where I wish to go," he said in a chilling voice.

Franklin pulled back the frock coat he wore, revealing a holstered pistol on his hip. "You'll not come in here," he said in clear challenge. "Mr. Fitzsimmons and his manager, Mr. Julian, have barred you from the camp."

"I am not armed, sir," Earl declared.

"That, sir, is fortunate for one of us," Franklin replied.

"I assure you I *will* be armed the next time we meet," Earp promised.

"I'll look forward to it," Franklin told him.

Earp stalked back to the hitched buggy, his gambler friends following.

The two fighters finally met one day.

It was immediately after the big arena was finished, and Gentleman Jim and his manager, William Brady, decided to go out and take a look at it. Corbett invited Big Jeff, his favorite sparring partner, to come along.

The arena was an enormous circle of raw wooden bleachers, built to seat twenty-five thousand spectators. It looked stark and somehow alien standing alone and empty on the prairie in the afternoon sun. Several hundred townspeople and a dozen reporters gathered to watch as the champion climbed into the ring and inspected its floor, posts, and roping.

"Seems good to me, Bill," he said to Brady. At that moment, Fitzsimmons, doing his roadwork with his brother-in-law manager Martin Julian, trotted over from a nearby road to take a look themselves. "Well, now," Gentleman Jim said with a smile, "look who's here." Fitz, seeing the champion, turned to leave, but Corbett yelled, "Hey, come over here! Let's have a look at you!"

Hesitantly, Fitz and Martin Julian made their way down to the ring, where Corbett jumped down to meet the:n. Anticipation undulated through the crowd and the spectators pressed closer to watch. When the two opponents stood face-to-face, the one a handsome Adonis, the other homely as a gargoyle, Fitz shyly held out his hand and said, "It's an honor, Mr. Corbett."

Corbett, sensing a rare psychological opportunity, put both hands in his pockets. "I'll shake your hand only after I've knocked you out, mister."

Fitz's already florid face became scarlet. He turned and walked briskly out of the new arena, his brother-in-law hurrying after him.

Corbett then turned to the press. "Gentlemen, I'm now more confident than ever of winning. Fitzsimmons doesn't belong in the same ring with me. And did you see how ugly the man is? The heavyweight champion of the

"You're sure it's him?" Mysterious Dave Mather asked, almost menacingly. "Sure as can be, sir," Chester said.

world should be a handsome man like myself!"

The spectators laughed in appreciation, and back out on the road it was heard by Fitzsimmons. "He's got the world laughing at me, Martin," the contender said.

"Pay him no mind, Bobby," Julian urged.

"I'll not," Fitz said. "But when I get him in the ring, I'll kill the son of a bitch."

Martin Julian's mouth dropped open in surprise. It was the first time Fitzsimmons had ever denigrated an opponent.

On the day of her date with Leon Coleman, Arrie spent part of the twenty dollars given to her by Annie Franklin to buy new clothes for her two little boys. Then she asked the bellboy, Chester, to do her a favor.

"Chester, will you take these out to Leona Clay's when you take the guest laundry over? Tell Leona to put these clothes on the boys for the show tonight. And could you stop at the post office on the way back and see if there's anything for me in General Delivery?"

"You bet, Arrie," the boy said, refusing the dime she offered as a tip. He remembered the first dime she had given him, that day in the employment line, and considered her a special person.

A little while later, Chester rolled the Ormsby House laundry cart out to Leona Clay's place. "Arrie sent these new clothes for her boys to wear tonight," he said when Leona met him at the door.

"Oh, ain't they nice," Leona praised, looking at the two little Buster Brown suits. "Push the cart on around back," she said without thinking. "I want to make sure these will fit the boys."

Leona went into the house, looking for Arrie's boys. Normally she would have had Chester empty the laundry cart on the front porch and she would have brought the finished laundry out to be returned. But on this day she got careless, and when Chester Gillette pushed the cart into the back yard, he came face to face with the Indian, Kid. Chester's mouth dropped open; then he quickly gained control of himself and went about unloading the soiled laundry and loading the stacked finished laundry from a bin on the back porch. The Kid stared suspiciously at Chester, then hurried into the house just as Leona, who had realized her mistake, came hurrying out.

"He's jus' somebody passing through," she quickly formed a lie for Chester. "I'm letting him work for his supper, then he'll be on his way."

"No matter to me," Chester said, shrugging.

But as Chester was leaving, the Kid stared after him from a window, his dark eyes level and dangerous. "Boy see me," he told Leona ominously.

"It's all right," she said, putting an arm around him. "I made up a story for him."

"He know my face."

"He couldn't," Leona assured. "He's jus' a boy from Back East somewheres; Arrie told me about him." She leaned over and kissed the Kid. "Don't worry, sugar."

But the Kid kept staring after Chester Gillette until the boy was out of sight.

Josie Earp was walking down Musser Street window shopping when she came to a crowd gathered outside the Western Union office. They were listening as the telegrapher received and shouted news of a message to them.

". . . announcement that William McKinley has just been sworn in as the twenty-fifth President of the United States!"

A loud cheer went up from the spectators. As Josie waited to pass, she looked across the crowd and met the eyes of Annie Franklin. Each knew who the other was, for each had heard her husband comment on the husband of the other. And each knew that bad blood was brewing between the two men.

When Annie Franklin did not look away or turn to leave, Josie Earp navigated the bystanders and went up to her. "Mrs. Franklin, I am Josephine Earp—"

"Yes, I know."

"Would you come have tea with me? There's something we need to discuss."

"Yes, there is," said Annie. "And yes, I would like very much to have tea with you."

The wives of the two gunmen walked together to a small tearoom on a side street. After they were served, Josie said with a sigh, "I had hoped this sort of thing was behind Wyatt."

"I know," Annie sympathized. "I feel the same way about my man. Do you suppose there is some way we can keep them apart?"

Masterson flushed deep red. "My gun hand's not crippled, Dave. You'd best remember that."

"We can try," Josie said. She touched Annie's hand. "If *we* can't, I'm afraid no one can."

Two weeks before the fight, Arrie was asked to work late one evening to serve supper in the suite of the elderly Mr. Bolton, who had caught cold visiting the numerous bookmakers. Bolton was sitting up in bed, dressed in a luxurious satin bedcoat, a wool nightcap on his head. Arrie set a table for him in front of the suite's crackling fireplace, then helped him put on his slippers.

"Thank you, my dear," Bolton said, sniffing.

"I'm going to have the kitchen send up some strong tea with blackstrap molasses in it for you to drink at bedtime," Arrie said. "Here, keep this lap robe over your legs while you're out of bed."

Bolton smiled gratefully at the young woman's attention. He did not notice until Arrie had left that she had dropped a letter on the floor. The old bandit knew he should not read it, but his curiosity prevailed. On a single sheet of lined paper, written poorly in pencil, Arrie's estranged husband, George Barker, was begging her to come back with their two little boys. It was a simple, touching plea, one that brought tears to Bolton's eyes.

A little while later, while drinking the tea Arrie had sent up, Bolton went to the window to look out on the busy street below. To his surprise, he saw Arrie walking hand in hand with Leon Coleman, the young desk clerk. The old man sighed wearily. Youth, he thought, always found it so easy to take the wrong path.

He turned off the light and climbed back into bed. He lay awake in the dark for a long time, sadly recalling the terrible price, worse than prison, that he had paid for his own youthful folly.

Chester Gillette was in Mysterious Dave Mather's room.

"You're sure it's him?" Mather asked, almost menacingly.

"Sure as can be, sir," Chester assured the bounty hunter. "I looked him right in the face. But the black woman there, she said he was working for his supper and would be moving on."

"All right," Mather said thoughtfully. He gave Chester twenty dollars. "Not a word about this to anybody, get me?"

"Not a word, sir," Chester promised. He hurried out of the room.

Mather put on an overcoat against the evening chill and started out of the hotel. At the lobby doors, he encountered Bat Masterson.

"Going out for a stroll, Dave?" the lawman asked.

"That's right," Mather said. He faced Masterson, unafraid. "I'd ask you to come along, Bat, but I doubt you could keep pace with me, you being a cripple."

Masterson flushed a deep red. "My gun hand's not crippled, Dave. You'd best remember that."

Smiling his cruel smile, Mysterious Dave Mather went on out and down the street.

A few minutes later, Mather was stealthily prowling around Leona Clay's house, peering in each lighted window. In the kitchen, he saw a dark man eating cornbread and stew. Mather tensed at the sight of him. It was Zenogalache—the Apache Kid.

Taking up position across the dirt street from the house, Mather watched for the Kid to finish eating and leave. *If he heads out of town*, the bounty hunter thought, *I'll take him on the road and haul him down to Reno for the law there.* For as much as Dave Mather did not fear Bat Masterson, neither did he want to fight him. Mysterious Dave drew his gun only for money—and there was no profit in killing Bat Masterson. Unless Masterson tried to interfere with him.

Mather waited until midnight. The Kid never came out.

Special trains had begun to arrive daily now, each one bringing new celebrities to see the impending fight. The great John L. Sullivan arrived, amid tremendous excitement, for he had been fledgling America's first world heavyweight champion, and it was from him that Gentleman Jim had won the crown. Corbett met his now obese predecessor at the depot; they shook hands heartily and went off to feast at the Ormsby House.

Bat Masterson's men continued to patrol the town, unsmilingly keeping the peace. Some people noticed that Bat's friend Wyatt Earp was also now carrying a pistol that made a bulge under his coat. Word had spread about the Earp-Franklin feud, but somehow the two men never seemed to encounter each other. Their wives

Mysterious Dave Mather dragged a suitcase from under his bed and took out a shotgun with its dual barrels sawed off.

were observed speaking every day, but the men kept missing each other, often by only five or ten minutes.

The Makara Minstrel Company arrived from St. Louis, and this time Arrie left her boys at home and attended alone with Leon Coleman. When one of the acts featured a patriotic tribute to the American flag, Coleman grunted derisively and whispered to Arrie, "Those red stripes represent the blood of the oppressed and the downtrodden. Some day that flag will be dragged from its mast and burned by its own citizens."

Arrie was shocked at both the fervor and content of his statement. Later, when she questioned Leon on the walk home, he told her some of his radical views. She was left feeling strangely uneasy that night.

Not so much, however, that she did not allow and enjoy his passionate good-night kiss.

Mysterious Dave Mather was disappointed when the Kid did not leave Leona Clay's house. After some further observation—seeing the light go on in the bedroom—he decided that the Kid was not passing through at all, but actually lived there. With that determined, the time to take him, Mather decided, was on the day of the big fight, while Bat Masterson and his men were preoccupied at the arena. That decision made, the bounty hunter reduced his surveillance of the Apache Kid to a couple of strolls past Leona's place each day, just to reassure himself that his prey was still there.

Leona Clay was an observant woman, however. The daughter of a slave, she had survived in life by being alert to silent dangers around her. It was not long before Mysterious Dave Mather was himself being watched by Leona. After a couple of days, she pointed him out to Arrie through the curtains.

"He's been watching my place right regular. You suppose he after you?"

"He couldn't be," Arrie said. "My husband couldn't afford to pay anyone to look for me. Anyway, I wrote George where I was. He's already written me back at General Delivery, but I lost the letter."

"No reason for this man to be watching me," Leona said. "Mus' be the Kid he after."

As Mather sauntered past the house, Arrie said, "He's registered at the hotel. I'll ask Leon to find out who he is."

Charles Bolton asked Arrie to do him a favor on her day off.

"I'd like to visit both training camps, but I don't feel up to handling a buggy and a team of horses. Would you consider driving for me?"

"I try to spend my day off with my little boys," Arrie hesitated.

"I'll pay you well," Bolton coaxed. "And you can bring the boys along."

Arrie agreed and rented a rig with money Bolton gave her, and on a clear, sunshiny day, with her two sons riding in the back, she drove the old ex-bandit first to Shaw Springs to see the champion train, then across town to Cook's Grove to watch the challenger. Early in the course of the day, Bolton returned Arrie's letter and admitted reading it.

"That wasn't very nice, Mr. Bolton," she chastised.

"No, it wasn't," he admitted. "But I'm glad I did." He gazed off at the distance. "I had a daughter like you once, long ago. I gave her up for a life of foolish adventure. Her mother took her away somewhere and I've never seen her since." Looking back at Arrie, he said, "I'd like to help you, if you'll let me."

"Help me how?" Arrie asked.

"If you'd like to go back to your husband and give the marriage another try, why, I'll pay your way. I'll even throw in some extra money to give your husband's farm a little boost."

"Why would you do that for me?" Arrie asked, a lump in her throat.

"For the little girl I gave up," Bolton said. "In the hope that somebody helped her if she ever needed it."

Arrie, touched, agreed to think it over.

The rest of the day was pleasant for all. Arrie's boys were thrilled to see the great fighters up close, and Charles Bolton was able to study each contestant at length. And Arrie had time, away from her job, to think—about George Barker, the husband she had left, and Leon Coleman, the young anarchist she had met.

Arriving back at the Ormsby House, Bolton decided to cancel all his bets on the champion; Corbett, he felt, was not taking the Fitzsimmons challenge seriously

The two battlers entered the ring at noon. Fitzsimmons waited impatiently in his corner, tense, on edge, his mood clearly dark.

enough. As the old man strode off toward the bookmakers', and before Arrie left to return the buggy, Leon Coleman came out of the hotel to speak to her.

"That man you asked about is called Mysterious Dave Mather. He's a bounty hunter and professional killer."

Arrie hurried home to tell Leona.

There had been much discussion, and not a little anxiety among the principals, about what the weather would be like on the day of the big fight. At best, northern Nevada weather was unpredictable that time of year. Promoter Dan Stuart, in particular, had done some nail-chewing, consulted a gypsy fortune teller, spoken through an interpreter to a Paiute medicine man, and even taken a few minutes to pray at St. Michael's Catholic Church.

Something must have worked, because March 17 arrived unseasonably warm, clear as new glass, and bathed with glorious sunshine. Dan Stuart, still in his longhandles, threw open his hotel room window when he saw the brilliant morning and yelled, "Yeeeeee-ha!" for all on Musser Street to hear. Then, humming an Irish ditty, he quickly shaved and dressed.

An hour later, from the Ormsby House mezzanine, Mysterious Dave Mather watched as Stuart held a press conference in the lobby. "I am pleased to announce," the happy promoter said, "that the third man in the ring for today's historic battle will be the world renowned referee, Mr. George Siler. And the timekeeper at ringside will be none other than the man who has kept the peace here in Carson City for the past two weeks, Mr. Bat Masterson!"

Amid applause from the spectators below, Mysterious Dave smiled coldly and returned to his room, where he dragged a suitcase from under the bed and took out a shotgun with its dual barrels sawed off to eight inches.

When the press conference in the lobby was over, Arrie asked Leon Coleman to have someone relieve him at the desk so that she could speak with him in private. "I've decided to go back to my husband," she told him when they were outside. "For the sake of the boys. He's their father and I can't deprive them of him."

Leon was surprised. "I thought that you— That is, that we— Well, that there was some feeling between us—"

"There is," Arrie admitted. "But I need a father for my sons, and I'm afraid of you, Leon. Some of the things you say about the American flag and overthrowing the government—well, they just scare me. I have to think of my sons."

Hurt, Leon nevertheless understood. He tried to give Arrie some money he had saved, but she declined it. In her purse was five hundred dollars in fifty-dollar notes that Charles Bolton had given her only an hour earlier. The old ex-bandit had kissed her on the cheek and said, "Farewell, my second daughter. May you find happiness wherever you go."

Arrie had left him with tears in her eyes, and she now did the same to Leon Coleman as she strode briskly toward Leona Clay's house to get her sons and gather her belongings for the first train that would be leaving after the fight.

In front of the Ormsby House, the Earps and the Franklins both walked out at the same time to their waiting buggies to take them to the arena. Earp and Franklin locked eyes in a steady gaze, but to their surprise, their wives greeted each other warmly.

"Annie, isn't it a lovely day for the fight," Josephine Earp said.

"Absolutely perfect, Josie," replied Annie Franklin. The two women clasped hands. "Let's sit together for part of the fight," Annie suggested.

"Oh, yes, what fun!" Josie Earp said enthusiastically.

The two gunmen, both of them incredulous, were guided into their respective buggies with mouths agape, and off they went to the arena.

Just before noon, the two fighters arrived at an arena filled to capacity; such was the tension and anticipation in Carson City that many had taken their seats immediately after breakfast. At the entrance, Bat Masterson's men collected all firearms—except Wyatt Earp's and Alexander Franklin's, the duly hired bodyguards of the fighters. Representatives of the Edison Kinetoscopic Exhibition Company had already set up their equipment for the first championship boxing match ever to be filmed.

The two battlers entered the

In the ring, Ruby Bob's face was being slashed to ribbons by Corbett's flashing fists.

ring at noon. Both wore ankle-length robes, the champion's luxurious blue satin; the challenger's plain white cotton, made by his wife. Corbett went about testing the ring floor for sturdiness; he was at ease, smiling, talking to ringsiders. Fitzsimmons waited impatiently in his corner, tense, on edge, his mood clearly dark. When the Kinetoscopic operator asked the two men to pose for his camera, Gentleman Jim came to the ropes still smiling, waving, posing. Fitz stood six feet away from him, unsmiling, refusing to go closer, refusing even to look at the champion.

At ringside, Bat Masterson finally yelled, "Two minutes until the first bell!"

In their corners, the fighters removed their robes. Both wore blue skintight boxing trunks; Corbett's were solid blue, Fitz's had a red and white waistband. Referee Siler called them to the center of the ring, gave them brief final instructions, and said, "Shake hands now, gentlemen, and come out fighting at the bell."

Corbett raised his hands to touch gloves, but Fitz, remembering the champion's recent insults, said, "Go to hell, *Gentleman* Jim," and returned to his corner, leaving a surprised Corbett looking after him. Angry, red-faced, Corbett strode back to his own corner.

"I'm going to beat his homely face to pulp," he said to his manager, William Brady.

The bell sounded for round one.

At Leona Clay's house, Mysterious Dave Mather slipped into the laundry yard and saw the Apache Kid dozing in the sun on a wash rack. Taking the shotgun from under his coat, he silently slid the well-oiled safety off. The Kid was wanted dead or alive; Mather intended to shotgun him in both knees so that if he subsequently died from the wounds he could still be identified. With a horse and buggy waiting outside, the bounty hunter could have the Kid halfway to Reno before the big fight was over.

Inside the laundry yard, Mather moved stealthily along the back wall of the shanty house. He backed past an open window, and as he did his eyes suddenly widened and he sucked in his breath. His mouth dropped open; the shotgun fell from his hands. The Kid, hearing the noise, sprang up and stood staring at Mather. The bounty hunter slowly turned around and the Kid saw a long-handled kitchen knife deep in his lower back.

From inside the window, Leona watched as Mather fell, a circle of blood beginning to spread over his gray frock coat.

In the ring at the arena, there was also blood. Ruby Bob's face was covered with it. Gentleman Jim, the dancing master who had destroyed the great John L. Sullivan, was doing the same to Fitzsimmons. The challenger's face was being slashed to ribbons by Corbett's flashing fists.

By the end of the fourth round, Fitz was slumped on the stool in his corner, utterly bewildered. "I never thought any man could hit me so often—or so easily," he told Martin Julian between gasping breaths. The fighter looked down at the nearest ringside seat and shook his head glumly at Rose.

Across the ring, Corbett was smiling and exchanging comments with Wyatt Earp and other spectators. Vera Corbett was not in the arena; she had never attended any of her husband's fights, considering it unladylike. As always, she waited in the hotel for a victorious world champion to return to her.

At ringside, Bat Masterson struck the bell for round five.

In the laundry yard, Leona told the Kid who the dead man was. Trembling and weeping over what she had done, she let herself be drawn into her lover's arms to be comforted. The Kid took her into the house and had her lie down.

Returning to the yard, the Kid got a shovel and began digging a hole next to one of the big washtubs. When he had a shallow grave ready, he dragged the dead Dave Mather into it. Then he lowered the funnel on the big wooden tub and let the water run into a nearby drainage gutter. While the water ran out, the Kid took all the money and a gold watch from Mather's pockets, then proceeded to cover the body with dirt. Presently he looked up and found Leona beside him, raking the loose dirt.

They worked swiftly together.

By the end of the fifth round, ringside gamblers were offering odds of twenty-to-one against Fitzsimmons.

In the sixth, the smiling champion continued to dance and jab,

Fitz's knees buckled. He fell forward, clutching Corbett around the waist.

while Fitz continued to chase and bleed.

Then Gentleman Jim appeared suddenly to tire of the game; abruptly he stopped backpedaling, stood flatfooted, and drove a brutal right cross into the challenger's bloody, raw face. Fitz's knees buckled. He fell forward, clutching Corbett around the waist. The champion pulled back; Ruby Bob dropped to his knees.

At ringside, Rose's cheeks were streaked with tears; she had to turn her face away, unable to watch. Siler and Masterson began the count as the crowd cheered wildly. Gentleman Jim strode around the ring, right hand held high. From the canvas, Fitzsimmons looked up at him through swollen eyes. When the count reached six, Fitz forced one knee off the canvas. Siler tolled eight; Fitz sucked in a deep breath.

"Nine!" shouted Siler—and the challenger leaped to his feet, beating the count by one second.

Disbelief rippled through the crowd. Corbett stared incredulously at his opponent; then he grimly moved toward him again. Fitzsimmons backed onto the ropes and used both arms to protect his face and head as Corbett punished his body at will.

Miraculously, Fitzsimmons managed to last the round.

Between rounds, Josie Earp left her seat and went over to talk to Annie Franklin. Alexander Franklin rose and offered her his seat, which she took. When the next round was about to start, Franklin had no choice but to kneel down on the ground, or take Josie's seat next to Wyatt. He walked over to a glowering Earp. People in the surrounding seats watched them closely, tension mounting.

"Mr. Earp," Franklin said, loud enough for those around him to hear, "my job here ends today. Our misunderstanding arose from my doing what I was hired to do, much as you did, sir, when you wore a badge. I hope you will understand that there was no personal animosity involved. Nor did I intend to be rude or ungentlemanly."

"Is that an apology, sir?" Wyatt asked evenly.

"It is if you will accept it, sir," Franklin said.

"I do accept it." Wyatt nodded brusquely. "Take a seat, Mr. Franklin, since it appears that my wife has appropriated yours."

Franklin sat and offered Earp a cigar, taking one for himself also. Earp dug a thumbnail into the head of a stick match and lighted both of them. As the fight resumed, spectators paid no further attention to Earp and Franklin, now that it was obvious that they were not going to try to kill each other. But Wyatt could not resist asking a question that had plagued him since Alexander Franklin had arrived in town.

"Meaning no offense," he leaned closer to ask, "but is Alexander Franklin your true name, sir?"

"It is part of my true name, Mr. Earp. My full name is Alexander Franklin James. Of Liberty, Missouri."

"Well, I'll be damned," Earp said, shaking his head wryly. "Frank James."

* * *

In the seventh round, Fitzsimmons somehow marshaled a second wind and again began to pursue Corbett. But, as in the previous rounds, the champion was just too incredibly fast to present any kind of target. Most of Ruby Bob's punches missed; he had hit Corbett in the face less than a dozen times since the fight began. Fitz intensely wanted to do to Corbett's face what Corbett had done to his, but there was clearly no chance of doing it. Martin Julian had told him as much between rounds.

"You can't touch his head, Bobby," his brother-in-law said. "You must go to the body, lad. Remember what they say about snakes: kill the body and the head will die. Go for his gut, Bobby!"

Now Fitzsimmons did just that. At the first opportunity that presented itself, he stepped in and threw a hard left to Corbett's midsection. The champion's knees buckled ever so slightly. He was nowhere close to going down, but for the rest of the round he slowed down just a fraction, a barely perceptible reduction in speed that only Fitzsimmons was able to notice.

When the round ended and Fitz returned to his corner, he looked at Martin Julian with the barest flicker of a bloody smile.

At ringside, Charles Bolton observed that flicker and immediately went to the nearest bookmaker, who was shouting, "Twenty-five to one against the challenger! Taking all bets here!"

"Five hundred on Fitzsimmons," Bolton said.

Fitzsimmons unleashed a devastating left hook to the champion's stomach.

* * *

In the laundry yard, Mysterious Dave Mather was now completely covered with dirt and rocks. The Apache Kid had taken the empty washtub off its wooden support slab and moved the slab on top of the grave. When he got the tub back onto the repositioned slab, he pulled the water tank hose over and filled it up again. Leona, still using the rake, carefully spread dirt where the tub had previously stood.

When the two were finished, they went to the back door of the shanty house and surveyed their work. Only the most observant eye would notice that two of the big tubs were now three feet farther apart than they had been.

Leona had seen the horse and buggy tied across the road and told the Kid about it. Now he said, "I take rig far out of town, hide in woods, turn horse loose on prairie. After dark, I come back."

Leona kissed him fervently and asked fearfully, "You promise to come back?"

The Kid nodded and left. Leona could not help wondering whether she would ever see him again.

Beginning in round ten, and despite his horrible appearance —the terribly slashed face had dripped blood all over his chest and arms—Ruby Bob Fitzsimmons had actually been gaining in strength. His training regimen now began to tell. Gentleman Jim was still moving stylishly about the ring, but he had slowed down drastically; half the time he was flat-footed instead of up on his toes. Fitz kept working the left hook on him, digging into the champion's stomach and side. Corbett now grimaced each time one of the blows landed.

At ringside, Rose Fitzsimmons had dried her tears and was sitting forward eagerly in her seat. When her husband landed a solid blow, she yelled unabashedly, "Good, Bobby! Once more, luv, once more now!"

By the fourteenth round, Gentleman Jim Corbett was a very tired fighter. For six rounds the challenger's body blows had been draining his energy and sapping his speed. No longer did he even try to dance around the ring; now he plodded, moving like Sullivan had moved five years earlier when the flashing Corbett had taken the title from him. In contrast, Fitz was moving faster, bobbing and weaving in and out of range as he continued to punish the champion's body. Fitz had made a gallant and obvious comeback. At ringside, the gamblers were now shouting, "Even money here! Even money bets!"

Midway in the fourteenth round, with Corbett facing the Kinetoscopic camera, Fitzsimmons suddenly unleashed a devastating left hook deep to the pit of the champion's stomach. Corbett's face drained white and he clutched his middle as if something had broken inside. Staggering to his right, he tried not to fall. Fitz, seeing Corbett's face unprotected for the first time in the fight, instinctively threw the left again, with all the power he could muster. It landed perfectly on Corbett's nose and mouth.

The champion's right knee hit the canvas. He put out his right glove to keep himself from tumbling onto his side. His handsome face contorted in pain, he made great heaving sounds, trying to draw air into his lungs.

Siler and Masterson began the count. Corbett crawled on one knee toward the ring ropes. Fitz backed across the ring and stood waiting. The crowd was on its feet in a frenzy. The count reached five. Corbett grabbed the ring rope and tried to pull himself erect, but he could not do it; his body refused to unbend from the paralyzing blow. The handsome champion could only listen helplessly as George Siler shouted the count inches from his face.

"Eight! Nine! Ten—and out!"

Knowing it was over, Corbett let go of the ring rope and fell back onto the canvas.

Rose Fitzsimmons bounded into the ring and began kissing her husband's raw, bloody face. "You did it, Bobby, you did it!" she shouted. "You're champion of the world now!" Across the ring, William Brady and Big Jeff were helping their fallen battler off the canvas. Pandemonium reigned as Bat Masterson's men quickly moved up to cordon off the ring. Martin Julian managed to get Fitz's robe on him and began trying, with Rose, to maneuver him out of the ring. Before they could make it, Corbett, with Big Jeff supporting him, came over and said, "You'll have to fight me again, you know."

Fitz shook his head. "Never. You've been humiliating me publicly for weeks, and now I've humbled you in the ring for it. We're

even, Jim Corbett. I never want to see your face again."

As the new heavyweight champion left the ring and made his way through the crowd, Corbett looked down and met the eyes of John L. Sullivan. The two men, both ex-champions now, stared at each other, until Sullivan looked away in embarrassment.

"My title," Corbett said sadly to Big Jeff. "It's gone and I'll never have a chance to win it back."

"You will, Jim," Big Jeff said quietly. "You'll fight for the championship again."

The words sounded almost like a promise.

IN LATER YEARS

Ruby Bob Fitzsimmons was true to his word: he never again faced Gentleman Jim Corbett in the ring. But two years later he lost his title on an eleventh round knockout—to Big Jeff, better known as James J. Jeffries. After winning the title, Jeff kept *his* word: he defended the championship against his old employer Corbett, knocking out Gentleman Jim in twenty-three rounds. Then he fought them each a second time, stopping Fitz in eight, Corbett in ten. Jeffries retired in 1905, having held the title for six years, and never having been beaten by any man he faced.

Ruby Bob died of pneumonia in Chicago in 1917; Rose survived her beloved husband for three decades, dying there in 1947. Gentleman Jim Corbett passed away in Bayside, Long Island, in 1933 at the age of sixty-six; Vera Stanhope Corbett outlived him by twenty-five years, dying in New York in 1958. Big Jeff bought a farm in Burbank, California, and lived there until his death in 1953 at the age of seventy-eight.

Wyatt Earp and Frank James never met again. Earp and Josie went to Alaska, where Wyatt opened the Dexter Saloon in Nome. They later returned and settled in Los Angeles, where Earp died in 1929 at the age of eighty. Frank James and Annie eventually lived out their lives in Kansas City, Missouri. Frank died in the James family home in Liberty in 1915 at the age of seventy-two, and was buried next to his brother, Jesse. Josie Earp and Annie James both died on the same day, December 19, 1944. Josie was eighty-eight, Annie ninety-three.

Bat Masterson, plagued by slowing reflexes and failing eyesight, moved to New York City and became a sportswriter for the *Morning Telegraph*. He died in 1930 at the age of seventy-seven.

Leon Coleman, real name Czolgosz, returned to the East and resumed his involvement in anarchist movements, becoming more and more a fanatic. On September 6, 1901, he worked his way through a crowd at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, and shot President William McKinley twice in the stomach with a .32 revolver. The President died eight days later. The assassin was quickly tried, convicted, and sentenced to die. On October 29, 1901, just forty-three days after his crime, he was executed in the electric chair at Auburn Prison.

Chester Gillette rode the rails of America until he was twenty, then asked a wealthy uncle who owned a shirt factory in Cortland, New York, for a job. He was hired as a shipping clerk, but within two years had worked his way up to an executive position. Along the way he had become intimate with Grace Brown, a factory girl. After subsequently falling in love with a society debutante and being accepted by her wealthy family, he learned that the factory girl was pregnant. Chester took

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her boating on Big Moose Lake in the Adirondacks, battered her face in with an oar, and let her drown. Convicted of the crime, in March 1908 Gillette died in the same electric chair that six years earlier had claimed Leon Coleman. In 1925, Theodore Dreiser novelized the story in *An American Tragedy,* and in 1951, Montgomery Clift portrayed the Chester Gillette character in the film, *A Place in the Sun.*

Charles E. Bolton lived for many years on his hidden Wells Fargo loot, and continued to be a philanthropist throughout his life, generously contributing to needy causes and people wherever he traveled. The man once known as Black Bart died on June 7, 1920, at the age of one hundred.

Arrie Clark returned to her husband, George Barker, in Aurora, Missouri, and there bore him two more sons: Arthur, in 1899, and Fred, in 1902. All four of her boys turned away from the dirt-poor farmland of the Great Depression and became bank robbers, roaming the South and Midwest. Wherever they went, Arrie went, too—because they were her boys, no matter what they did. She stuck by them all the way to her grave when, in January 1935, she and her youngest, Fred, were killed in an FBI raid on their rental house in Florida. Arrie was then sixty-three years old, and was known throughout America as Ma Barker.

The laundry yard where Mysterious Dave Mather was buried subsequently became a small coal and fuel oil storage yard. Then for many years it was a vacant lot. Today it is the site of a modest residence whose occupants are unaware of the history that lies beneath them.

* * *

The Apache Kid *did* come back to Leona Clay, and the pair quietly left Carson City a year later. By then, Leona had cut the Kid's long hair, and with a hot curling iron had twisted what remained until it became kinky. She repeated the process as necessary and from then on, the Kid passed for a black man. He and Leona moved to another western state, settled down, and had six children. The Kid died in 1912 at the age of fifty-five. Leona lived on for many years as the matriarch of thirteen grandchildren, twenty-one great-grandchildren, and thirty great-great-grandchildren. A great-great-grandson who became a prominent civil rights attorney in Washington, D. C., now carries Mysterious Dave Mather's watch in his vest pocket. Leona Clay died in 1974 at the age of 104.

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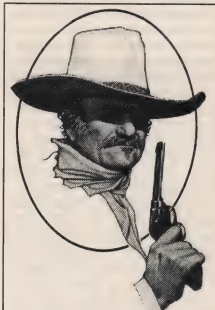

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LA

BY
Bill Gulick

The Shaming of Broken Horn

Toward sundown of the second day after the train reached Fort Hall, Harlan Faber, elected wagon captain, called a meeting of the emigrant families, as was the custom when a question affecting them all had to be voted on. Well aware by now that this western land was a man's land in which a woman must keep silent, Mary Bailey told her pa she guessed she'd stay by their wagons and catch up on the mending. But her pa said, "You got a right to be there. I want you to help me make up my mind which way to vote."

"Your mind's already made up, isn't it, Pa?"

"I know what I'd like to do, sure. But I want you at that meeting. Since your ma left us, you've taken her place, seems like."

So Mary went along, carrying some mending with her to keep her hands busy, standing at the edge of the crowd

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with her lanky, gray-haired, slow-spoken pa, Jed, and her younger brother, Mike, who was slim, dark-eyed, and, at fourteen, beginning to consider himself an adult. Mary, a pretty, black-haired, grave young lady of eighteen, had put away childish notions years ago.

Facing the crowd stood Harlan Faber. With him were Peter Kent, factor of Fort Hall; Broken Horn, the fierce-eyed Bannock chief whose imperious edict had brought on this present crisis; Tim Ramsey, guide for the wagon train; and a pair of American trappers who had drifted into the trading post the day before. Faber raised his hand for silence.

"You folks all know what this meeting's about. The trail forks here. What we got to decide is whether we want to go on to Oregon, like we'd planned, or change our plans and go to Californy."

As the wagon captain outlined the situation facing the emigrants, Mary studied the two American trappers curiously, for there were strange tales of these wild, rootless men. Both wore ragged, grease-stained buckskins and had an alert, almost savage look about them. To the stooped, older man, Charley Huff, she gave no more than a brief glance; but the younger man, Dave Allen, standing tall and straight, was so handsome and had such nice gray eyes that she stared at him shamelessly.

"If we go to Oregon," Faber was saying, "we'll have to pass through Bannock country. The Bannocks are on the warpath against Americans, Broken Horn says, an' will fight us every step of the way. But if we turn south an' head fer Californy, stayin' clear of Bannock country, Broken Horn says his bucks won't pester us. That's how matters stand. Speak up, men, an' tell me how you feel."

One by one the men spoke their sentiments, while their women-folk listened in silence. Jed whispered, "Well, Mary?"

"It's up to you, Pa. It's whatever you want to do."

"It's the seedlings I'm thinkin' about. To bring a whole wagon-load of 'em this far, then give up—"

"Jed Bailey!" Faber called out. "You got anything to say?"

New England born and bred, Jed shifted his weight from one foot to the other, cocked his head at the sky as if looking for sign of rain, then said slowly, "Does it freeze in Californy, come winter?"

Tim Ramsey said no it didn't, normally. Peter Kent and the two trappers agreed. Faber let his eyes run over the crowd. "Any more questions 'fore we take a vote?"

"Get on with it!" a man shouted. "Call the roll!"

"All right." Faber took a sheet of paper out of his pocket. "Joshua Partridge."

"Here!"

"I know you're here, you blamed fool! How do you vote?"

"Californy!"

"Frank Lutcher."

"Californy!"

"Matthew Honleiker."

"Californy!"

And so it went, down through the list until forty-nine names had been called. Now, with only one name left, the wagon captain paused, looked at Jed, then said, "Jedidiah Bailey."

Jed studied the blue sky and the far reach of parched land to the west. At last he said, "A man can't grow decent apples in country where it don't freeze."

"That ain't an answer, Jed. How do you vote?"

"Oregon."

Mary heard a murmuring run through the crowd. "Stubborn old fool . . . Jed Bailey and his damned apple trees . . . Let him git scalped. . . ."

Faber tallied the list. "Results of the vote. Fer Californy, forty-nine. Fer Oregon, one. Majority rules, as agreed. We'll pull out first thing in the mornin' fer Californy." He looked angrily at Jed. "Forty-nine of us, anyhow. I wash my hands of you, Jed Bailey. Meetin's adjourned."

The Bailey family walked back to their wagons in silence, Mary feeling proud of her pa, but not knowing how to put it into words. Mike went out to check on the grazing mules. Jed took a pair of wooden buckets and headed for the creek to get water for the seedlings. Mary readied supper. It being early July, dark came late, and though the sun had sunk by the time she called her menfolk to supper—a good meat stew filled with fresh vegetables grown in the Fort Hall garden, baked beans sweetened with molasses, hot biscuits, and dried-apple pie—there was still plenty of twilight left when they finished eating. Because she loved her pa and knew how worried he was, Mary treated him extra good.

"More pie, Pa?"

"Thank you kindly, Mary, but I reckon not." He gave her a gentle smile. "You're a fine cook, girl, just like your ma was. The man that marries you will get a real prize."

"Fiddlesticks!" Mary said, but the praise pleased her just the same.

Lighting his pipe, Jed brooded into the fire while Mike got out cleaning stick, rag, and oil and set to work cleaning his rifle. Busy with the dishes, Mary did not hear the visitors approach until Peter Kent said, "Good evening, Mr. Bailey. May I have a word with you?"

"Sure. What's on your mind?"

Turning around, Mary got the fright of her life, for standing an arm's reach away was that mur-

derous-looking Indian, Broken Horn. Likely she would have screamed if she hadn't looked past him and seen Charley Huff and Dave Allen. Dave Allen was smiling at her with those nice gray eyes, and somehow she knew nothing bad could happen when he was around. But watching Broken Horn sniff animal-like at the stew simmering in the iron pot and the pie keeping warm in the open Dutch oven, she did feel a mite uneasy.

"You're set on going to Oregon, I take it," Kent said. "Do you plan to wait here until an Oregon-bound train willing to fight its way through Bannock country comes along?"

"Can't hardly do that. Ours was the last train due to leave Independence this season." A questioning look came into Jed's eyes. "You got a proposition, Mr. Kent?"

"Yes. Charley and Dave here also want to go to Oregon. I'll vouch for their reliability, if you want to hire them as guides. I've talked to Chief Broken Horn, and he's agreed—for a reasonable consideration—to let you pass through his country."

"How much?"

"One hundred dollars."

"And these gents, how much do they want?"

"Two hundred dollars—apiece."

Jed fiddled with his pipe. "That's a sight of money."

"It's a sight of a job takin' two wagons an' three greenhorns through bad Injun country," Charley grunted.

"There's one thing I must make clear," Dave said, looking first at Mary, then at Jed. "If you do hire us, you've got to do exactly as we tell you at all times."

That was a mighty bossy way for a mere guide to talk, Mary thought angrily. Finishing the dishes, she carried them to the wagon and put them away. As she turned back to the fire, her mouth flew open in horror. Chief Broken Horn, fascinated by the smell emanating from the stew pot, had lifted its lid and was plunging a dirty butcher knife into its depths. This time she did scream.

"Stop that, you heathen!"

The Indian gave no sign that he heard her. Seizing the first weapon handy—a broom leaning against the wagon wheel—she made for him. As she raised the broom to strike, Dave Allen leaped toward her and caught her wrists.

"Easy, ma'am!"

Paying no attention to the commotion, Chief Broken Horn sniffed at the piece of meat he had impaled on his knife, diagnosed it as edible, and disposed of it at a single bite. Finding the sample good, he dipped his bare hand into the pot, gobbled down its contents, then, still masticating noisily, stooped and picked up the apple pie. Indignantly Mary struggled against the steel-like grip on her wrists.

"Let me go!"

The nice gray eyes weren't smiling now. "Don't you want to go to Oregon?"

"Of course I do!"

"You won't get there by beating Indian chiefs on the head with a broom. If you hit Broken Horn, he'd be so insulted he'd kill us all first chance he got!"

It was too late to save the pie anyway, so Mary let go of the broom. "All right, Mr. Allen. I won't harm your precious Indian. Now let me go."

The grin came back to his face, and he released her. "That's better." He turned to Jed. "Think you can control your daughter?"

Jed looked questioningly at Mary. Shamefaced, she dropped her gaze to the ground. She was still trembling with anger, not only at Chief Broken Horn but also at these two trappers who, to her way of thinking, were heartlessly taking advantage of her pa. Why, five hundred dollars was half of the family's lifetime savings! But this was a man's world, and it was not her place to object.

As Mary raised the broom to strike, Dave Allen leaped toward her and caught her wrists.

"I'll make no trouble, Pa. I promise."

"That's sensible talk," Dave said. He nodded to Jed. "It's set, then. We'll pull out first thing in the morning."

West of Fort Hall the trail followed the Snake River across flat, monotonous sagebrush desert, with mountains faint in the heat-hazed distance to the northwest and the green, swift-flowing river often lost deep in lava-walled canyons. Jed drove one wagon, Mary the other, except when the road got too bad, at which times Dave would tie his saddle horse to the tailgate, climb to the driver's seat, and take the reins. He drove as he did everything else, with a casual skill which the mules recognized and responded to, though the stubborn brutes gave Mary all kinds of trouble.

"Good mules," he said, grinning

at her as the wagon topped a particularly bad grade. "How come Jed was smart enough to use mules instead of oxen?"

"Pa is a smart man."

"What's he going to do with those seedlings?"

"Raise apples. Back home he had the finest apple orchard in the state."

"Why did you leave?"

"Ma died a year ago, and it took the heart out of pa. He got restless, hearing about the free land in Oregon and how scarce fresh fruit was out there. He kept talking about it, and I thought a change might do him good."

The wagon was on a perfectly level stretch of trail now, and there was no reason why Dave shouldn't turn the reins over to her, but he lingered. "Kind of hard on a woman, ain't it, leaving her friends and all?"

"Pa and Mike are all that matter to me."

"Most girls your age think more of catching a husband than they do of their pa and brother."

The way he put it exasperated her. "You make getting married sound like trapping."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily. "I meant no offense. But judging from what I've seen of women, most of 'em do have men on their minds when they get to be your age."

"I'll bet they pestered you no end when you lived in civilized country."

"Well, they did, if you want the truth."

"Is that why you ran away and turned trapper?"

"Nope. I just wanted to see what was on the other side of the hill."

"Did you find out?"

"Sure. Another hill—with another side to it." He stopped the wagon, handed her the reins, and climbed down. Mounting his horse, he said with a grin, "Don't say anything to those mules, gal. Maybe they'll think I'm still driving and won't give you no trouble."

Angrily she watched him gallop away. Then she gave the off-wheeler a lick with the whip that made him jump as if he'd been scalded.

For a week they traveled west without molestation, save for the torment of heat, dust, and monotony. Dave said the fact that they saw no Indians didn't mean the Indians hadn't seen them. Chief Broken Horn had ridden ahead, he said, to warn his people that the party of whites was coming; and scouts watching from the ridge tops likely were noting the progress of the wagons.

"We won't be safe," Dave said, "till we're into the Blue Mountains. And we'll have company before we get out of Bannock country, you can bet on that. When we do, Charley and I will tell you how to behave. Make sure you listen."

"We won't be safe," Dave said, "till we're into the Blue Mountains."

The two trappers had brought along several extra horses to pack their gear, and when Charley suggested that one of the animals' loads be stowed in a wagon, freeing the horse for Mike to ride and accompany him on hunts for fresh meat, the old trapper made himself a friend for life.

From dawn till dusk, Mike tagged after Charley, listening with youthful awe to Charley's rambling tales of beaver trapping, Indian fighting, and wilderness adventures. Mary was aware of the relationship that existed between boy and man, but she saw no harm in it.

One evening they camped in a grassy swale bare of trees, with the river five hundred feet below. It was quite a chore lugging up water for the seedlings; and by the time it was finished, Jed was done in. He lay down on the ground with a weary sigh.

"Jehoshaphat, I'm tired! Hungry, too. What's for supper, Mary?"

Mary was exhausted; the fuel was scant, and what there was of it refused to burn. "Nothing," she said shortly, "unless somebody fetches me some decent firewood."

"Mike," Jed said, "cut your sister some wood. Hustle, now!"

Charley and Mike were squatting nearby, the old trapper rambling on while the boy listened intently. Mary gave her brother a sharp look. "Mike!"

"Hmm?"

"Did you hear your pa?"

"What'd he say?"

"He told you to fetch me some firewood."

"Aw, fetch it yourself. That's squaw work."

Mary stared at her brother. Jed sat up with a scowl. "What did you say, son?"

Mike flushed, gave Charley a sidelong glance, and muttered, "Cutting firewood is squaw work. Ain't it, Charley?"

"Why, yeah, boy," Charley answered, scratching his ribs. "Amongst Injuns, that's how it is. The buck kills the game an'

brings it home, an' his squaw skins an' cooks it."

Dave, who had just strolled up, looked at Mike and said, "Don't believe everything Charley tells you, son."

"But Charley knows all about squaws!" Mike said indignantly. "He's had dozens of 'em! . . . Haven't you, Charley?"

"Wal, not dozens—"

Mary put her hands on her hips. "I never heard the like! Stuffing a boy full of awful stories!"

"Mike, fetch Mary some wood," Dave said firmly. "Jump, now! Charley, you help him."

Charley looked hurt. "Me? Me fetch wood?"

"If you want to eat, you'd better."

After supper, Mary strolled off into the twilight and sat down on a boulder overlooking the whispering river. Though she'd promised her pa she'd make no trouble, the chore of feeding four hungry, ungrateful men three times a day was getting on her nerves; and she knew if she had to listen to any more of their idle chatter, she'd likely bust loose and say something she'd regret. Hearing a quiet step behind her, she looked around. Dave had followed her.

"Nice night."

"Yes."

"You'd ought not to wander away from camp alone. Some Injun might see you and pack you home with him."

"Just let one try."

Sitting down beside her, he lighted his pipe. "Charley don't mean no harm. He just likes to tell big windies."

"Has he had many squaws?"

"Two or three."

"Did he—marry them?"

"Bought 'em."

She stared at him, not sure whether he was teasing her or telling the blunt truth. Deciding he was telling the truth, she exclaimed, "Do you mean to say Indian women are bought and sold like—like horses?"

"Sure. A man picks out a squaw he wants, dickers with her pa, and settles on a price. Some come higher than others, naturally. You take a young, healthy woman that's a good cook, she'll cost a man a sight more than a run-of-the-mill squaw would."

"What if she doesn't like the man that buys her? What if she refuses to live with him?"

"Why, he beats her. That generally makes her behave."

"I think that's horrible!"

His eyes were twinkling, and now the suspicion came to her that he hadn't been telling the truth. She was dying to ask him if he'd ever owned any squaws, but blessed if she'd give him a chance to tease her further. Grinning, he held out his hand and helped her up. "Come on, you'd better get back to camp. You're too good a cook to lose."

The Bannocks appeared while they were nooning the next day.

The Bannocks appeared while they were nooning next day. Seeing the squaws and children in the band, Dave said their intentions likely were peaceable, for Indians didn't take their families along when they had war in mind. But watching the savages set up their tepees a quarter of a mile down the valley, Mary felt uneasy.

Chief Broken Horn, accompanied by half a dozen of the leaders of the tribe, rode into camp presently. Broken Horn made a long speech, emphasized by many dramatic gestures. The gist of it was, Dave said, that Broken Horn considered himself a great man. Had he not made forty-nine wagons turn aside from the Oregon Trail because the American emigrants feared him? Was it not only through his generosity and by his consent that this small party was being permitted to cross his lands after paying the toll he demanded?

"Can't say as I like that kind of talk," Jed muttered.

"Let him brag," Dave said. "It don't hurt us a bit."

When the chief finished his speech, Dave frowned, then came over to Mary and said, "We're going to have company for supper."

"Chief Broken Horn?"

"Yeah. He and six of his headmen. You're to fix them a big feed, he says, with lots of stew and pie like you cooked for him back at Fort Hall."

"I didn't cook anything for him! He stole that food, and you know it."

"Well, he tells it different. Anyhow, he seems to like your cooking and wants more of it."

"Do you mean to tell me I've got to feed seven of those heathen?"

"Afraid so. He says when he eats well, his dreams are good. He says if his dreams are good tonight, he'll let us go on in peace. But if his dreams are bad—"

"Now, look here!" Jed cut in angrily. "The old thief made a bargain and he's got to stick to it, good dreams or bad!"

"We've got to humor him," Dave said, shaking his head. He looked at Mary. "Can you do it? Can you rustle up enough stew and pie to make them happy?"

Mary was tired and she was scared, but most of all, right now, she was mad. Seemed like all she'd done since she'd left home was cater to men, cooking for them, washing for them, mending for them. She hadn't minded those chores for her own family because that was her job. But if this was a man's land, why didn't the men out here act like men? Why had Harlan Faber and the other men back at Fort Hall let an arrogant old Indian turn them aside from their original destination? Why didn't Charley and Dave make Chief Broken Horn live up to his promise with no nonsense about dreams?

"All right," she said wearily. "I'll feed them. But you'll all have to help me."

Charley and Mike had killed an antelope and two deer the evening before, so meat was no problem. There was still half a barrel of dried apples left in the wagon; plenty of beans, sugar, and flour; fifty pounds of potatoes she'd bought at Fort Hall; and a few carefully hoarded onions, carrots, and dried peas. While Charley chopped wood and Dave carried water, she had Mike stretch a large square of canvas on the ground beside one of the wagons—on this her guests would sit. Brushing aside her pa's objections that it was casting pearls before swine, she made him dig out the family's best china, silverware, glasses, pitcher, and the canvas ground cloth. Except for the fact that her banquet table had no legs, it looked as attractive as any she'd ever set back home.

How much food could a hungry Indian eat? She made a liberal estimate of what a normal man with a healthy appetite could do away with at one sitting and tripled it, just to be on the safe side. She took special care that there should be more apple pie than her guests could possibly consume.

After putting a quantity of dried apples to soak for several hours, she prepared two dozen pie shells. When the apples had soaked sufficiently, she filled the shells, covered them with thin strips of dough, coated them with brown sugar, and baked them until they were almost done. One of her precious culinary treasures was a square tin of grated cheese flakes, which time and the dry western air had long since drawn all moisture from, but which, when sprinkled generously over the top of an apple pie and heated for a few minutes, melted and blended with the sugar to give the pie a delightful flavor. The tin was kept in a wooden chest in the wagon, along with her spices, extracts, and family medical supplies. She asked Mike to get it for her.

Climbing into the wagon, he rummaged around, then called, "Is it the red tin?"

"No, the blue one. Hurry, Mike!"

He clambered out of the wagon and handed her the tin. Taking a tablespoon, she hurriedly ladled a liberal layer of powdery flakes over the top of each pie, set them back in the Dutch ovens to bake, and turned her attention to other tasks. Some minutes later she was exasperated to find Mike, whom she had told to return the tin to the chest, curiously staring down at what remained of its contents.

"Mike, will you please quit dawdling and put that away?"

"How come you sprinkled this stuff on the pies?"

"Because it's cheese, you idiot!"

"Don't smell like cheese." He dipped finger and thumb into the tin, took a tiny pinch, sampled it. "Don't taste like cheese, either."

She stared at the tin in horror. It wasn't blue. It was green. And pasted on its side was a faded label. She read it and suddenly felt faint. "Oh, my goodness!"

She ran to one of the Dutch ovens, opened it, and snatched out a pie. Heedless of scorched fingers, she tried a tiny sample of the browned, delicious-looking crust. Mike did the same. He made a face.

"You going to feed these pies to the Indians?"

She closed her eyes and tried to think. The stuff wouldn't kill them, of that she was sure. It was too late to bake more pies, certainly, for even now the guests were arriving. Dressed in their finest, followed at a respectful distance by a horde of curious squaws, children, and uninvited braves, Chief Broken Horn and his subchiefs had dismounted from their horses and were walking into camp. Worn out and nerve ragged after her long afternoon of work, Mary felt like dropping to the ground and giving way to tears. Instead she got mad. She got so mad that she didn't care a hang what happened, just so long as those pies didn't go to waste.

Mary stared at the tin in horror. She read the faded label and suddenly felt faint.

Opening her eyes, she gave her brother a grim look.

"I certainly am. Get me the sugar, Mike. Indians will eat anything if it's sweet enough."

Judging from the amount of food consumed and the rapidity with which it vanished, the feast was a huge success. The Indians were vastly fascinated by the plates, dishes, and silverware, though they used their bare hands more than they did the knives, forks, and spoons. The cold tea, liberally sugared, was a great hit, too, disappearing as fast as Mike could fill the glasses. And the pie brought forth approving grunts from all.

Mary had given her own menfolk strict orders not to partake of the pie, telling them that she feared there might not be enough to go around; but as the Indians one by one lapsed into glassy-eyed satiety, with half a dozen still uneaten pies before them, Dave gazed longingly at the beautiful creation on the tablecloth between himself and Chief Broken Horn. He smiled up at Mary.

"Sure does look like fine pie. Can't I have a piece?"

"No," Mary said sharply.

"Not even a little one?" he persisted, picking up the pie. "Why, if you knew how long it's been since I tasted—"

"I said no," Mary cut in, rudely snatching the pie out of his hand. Pretending that she'd done it for the sake of her guests, she turned to Chief Broken Horn and smiled. "More pie, Mr. Broken Horn?"

The Indian made a sign indicating he was full up to his chin. As he looked her over from head to toe, a greedy, acquisitive light came into his black eyes. He turned and grunted something to Dave. Dave laughed and winked at Mary.

"He says you're a better cook than his own squaw is."

"That's very kind of him."

"He wants to know if your pa will sell you. He says he'd pay a fancy price."

Quick as a wink, Mary drew back her right arm and plastered Chief Broken Horn full in the face with the apple pie.

Mary was too tired to have much of a sense of humor right then. From the way Jed's face froze, he wasn't in a joking mood either. "I won't stand for that kind of talk in front of Mary."

"He didn't mean it as an insult," Dave said. "He meant it as a—"

Chief Broken Horn showed exactly how he had meant it by reaching up, seizing Mary's left wrist, and pulling her toward him. Livid-faced, Jed leaped to his feet. Dave swore and reached for the pistol in his belt. Charley drew his knife. Mike ran and grabbed up his rifle. But Mary was too angry to wait for help from her menfolk. Quick as a wink, she drew back her right arm and plastered Chief Broken Horn full in the face with the apple pie.

For a moment there wasn't a sound. The Indians were all staring at their chief, who lay flat on his back—pawing pie out of his eyes, kicking his heels in the air in a most unchieftainlike manner.

Getting his feet under him, Chief Broken Horn gave Mary a stunned, horrified glance, then wheeled and ran for his horse as if all the hounds of hell were after him. The other Indians wasted no time in following.

Mary took a long, deep breath. Turning to look at Jed, she said in a voice filled with shame, "I'm sorry, Pa."

"Don't be," Dave said, and his nice gray eyes were hard as flint. "If you hadn't done what you did, I'd have killed him where he sat."

A body does queer things in time of stress. Suddenly becoming aware of the way her menfolk were staring at her, their weapons in their hands, their eyes filled with amazement, relief, and admiration, she began to laugh. She laughed till tears ran out of her eyes; but for the life of her, she couldn't stop. Dave put an arm around her shoulders and said gently, "Easy, Mary—easy."

She sighed and quietly fainted.

As dark came on and the fires burned low, they sat huddled together, their backs against a wagon for safety's sake, listening to the drums in the Indian village. Mary was frightened now, but looking around, seeing the grim looks on the faces of her menfolk as they balanced their rifles across their knees, she was sure of one thing—her men would act like men if the need arose, and she was proud of them all.

"What do you think they'll do?" Jed said.

"Hard to tell," Dave answered. "Broken Horn has lost considerable face, being made a fool of by a woman in public. If there's going to be an attack, it will likely come at dawn. He'll spend the night stirring up the young bucks. The war drums are going already."

Charley, who had been listening intently to the sounds com-

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ing from the village, interrupted. "Quiet, boy!"

"What's the matter?"

"Them drums. They don't sound like war drums to me. Sound more like medicine drums."

"What's the difference?" Mary asked.

Patiently Dave explained that when Bannocks prepared for battle, the drums were pounded in one fashion; but when there was sickness in the tribe and the medicine man was called in to recite his chants and attempt to heal the ill person, the drums were beaten in another manner. "But Charley's wrong," he added. "Chief Broken Horn isn't going to let his medicine man fool around curing sick people tonight."

"Maybe he's sick. Eating all that food—"

"He's got the stomach of a wolf. No, they're war drums, no question about that," Dave insisted.

In the faint glow of the dying fires Mary saw a bulky figure appear on the far side of the camp. Dave called out a challenge in the Bannock tongue and was quickly answered by an Indian woman. He told her to approach the wagon, and she did so—her hesitant pace showing how frightened she was. She was fat, wrinkled, and middle-aged. Dave asked her who she was and what she wanted. As she spoke, he translated.

"She says she's Broken Horn's squaw."

"Is he going to attack?" Jed said.

"She says no."

"So he's going to stick to his bargain after all?"

"But the young bucks might, she says, if they can work up nerve enough. They're arguing it out now."

"Can't he keep them in line?"

Mary saw Dave frown as the squaw spoke. "She says he ain't interested in anything right now except the mess of bad spirits that have crawled into his belly. She says he's sick as a dog—and so are all the other chiefs that ate with us." Dave turned and gave Mary a sharp look. "She thinks you poisoned 'em."

"I didn't!"

"She says either you poisoned her man or cast an evil spell on him. What shall I tell her?"

"How come they all took sick, then?"

Mary flushed. "Maybe it was the beans and all that cold tea they drank."

"It was the apple pie, wasn't it? You wouldn't let us eat any of it, but you made sure they stuffed themselves with it. What did you put in that pie, Mary?"

Defiantly Mary looked at Dave. "Epsom salts."

"What?"

"It won't hurt them. In fact, they made such pigs of themselves, it might even do them some good. Why, I wouldn't be surprised but what they all dream real nice dreams—when they finally get to sleep. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

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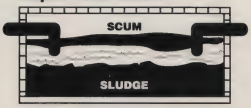

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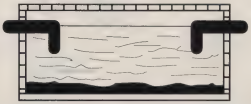

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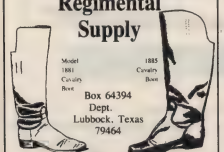

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Dave looked shaken. In fact, all her menfolk were staring at her, awe and respect in their eyes. Suddenly the squaw started gabbling furiously, pointing an accusing finger at Mary. Dave listened for a time, then he silenced her with a gesture.

"She says either you poisoned her man or cast an evil spell on him because he grabbed hold of you. Whichever it was you did, she's begging you to make him well. What shall I tell her?"

Mary smiled. "Tell her I cast a spell."

"Now, look here!"

"Tell her, please. Tell her that all white women have the power to cast spells over men when they get angry with them."

Reluctantly Dave spoke to the Indian woman. Her black eyes grew wide with fright as she stared at Mary, then she grunted a question. Dave said, "She wants to know how long the spell will last."

"Tell her two days. Tell her if her husband and the other sick chiefs lie quietly for two days and nights, thinking nothing but peaceful thoughts, they will get well. But if they let their people attack us, they will die."

An admiring grin spread over Dave's face. "Now why didn't I think of that?"

As he spoke to the squaw, Mary saw the frightened look fade from the woman's face. The squaw nodded vigorously, turned to go, hesitated; then shyly walked up to Mary, touched Mary's breast, then her own, grunted something, and ran off into the darkness. Mary looked at Dave.

"What did that mean?"

Dave didn't answer for a moment. Then, an uneasy light coming into his nice gray eyes, as if he were looking into the future, he answered, "She says you know how to handle men and she's glad you hit her husband with that pie. She's been wanting to sock the old fool for years." ⊞

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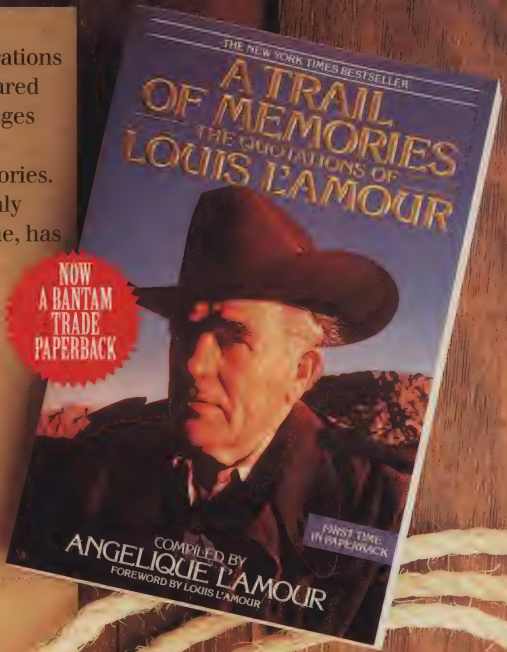

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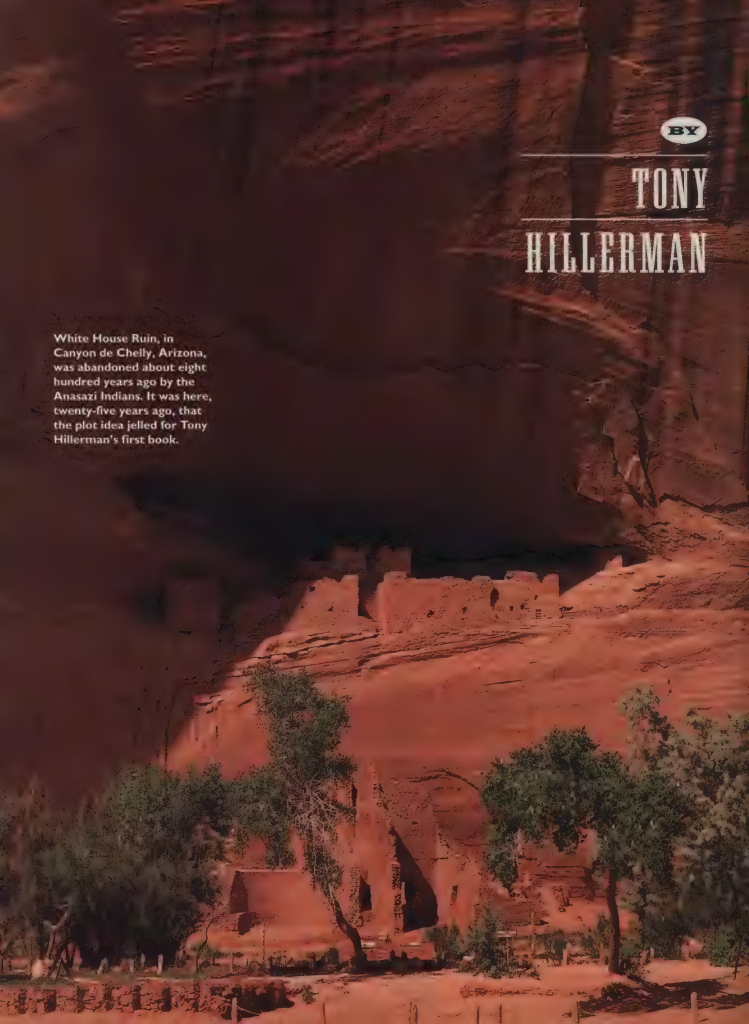

White House Ruin, in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, was abandoned about eight hundred years ago by the Anasazi Indians. It was here, twenty-five years ago, that the plot idea jelled for Tony Hillerman's first book.

OUR OWN HOLY LAND

FROM ALBUQUERQUE, THE California-bound Amtrak train detours down the shady bosquet of cottonwoods lining the Rio Grande. It crosses the river at Isleta Pueblo and climbs the long slope we call "the *llano.*" It's about then that I move up to the observation car. When the train tops the ridge a scene opens that never fails to move me. From this ridge you look into a land full of spirits.

The last time I looked into America's very own Holy Land from an Amtrak observation car it was late summer—the last days of the thunderstorm season. I sat near three men who had boarded days before, somewhere east of Chicago, and had formed the sort of friendship train travel encourages. When the train reached the top of the ridge and the emptiness of western New Mexico opened before us, their conversation stopped midsentence.

Shiprock rises out of an ocean of prairie grass like a Gothic cathedral built for giants.

"My God!" one said. "Why would anyone live out here?"

Why, indeed?

We looked across hundreds of square miles of dry country—eight inches of rain on a wet year, an infinity of needle grass, grama, snakeweed, fringed sage, and rabbit brush. The land is tan and gray, freckled here and there with the dark green of junipers, streaked and dappled with cloud shadows. Beyond this great bowl of prairie rise the shapes of Noer Butte, Chicken Mountain, and, dim blue with distance, the Zuni range where Spider Grandmother led the Zunis to the Center of the Universe. There are the Cebollitos; Mesa Gigante, where the Lagunas have their villages; and—looming above them all—the Turquoise Mountain of the Navajos. It is an arid landscape, inhospitable, almost empty, with none of the lush green that spells prosperity. It is built far out of human scale, too large for habitation, making man feel tiny, threatened, aware of his fragility and mortality.

Perhaps that is why it is good for me—why I seem to need it, and return at every excuse. As I cross the ridge and see the Turquoise Mountain looming on the horizon, the weight of Albuquerque—of the buzzing telephone, of unanswered mail and unkept promises—falls away. It is my favorite mountain, and the gateway to my favorite places.

One of them is on the mountain itself. We call it Mount Taylor. For the Tewa-speaking Pueblo Indians of the Rio Grande, it is Dark Mountain, where the two Little War Gods sometimes dwell. For the Navajos it is *Tsodzil,* one of the four mountains that mark the corners of *Dineh Bikeyah*—Navajo Country. It was built in its present form in this Navajo "Fifth World" by the spirit called First Man. But it had also existed in the earlier worlds through which the

NAVAJO SHAMANS COME TO THE TURQUOISE MOUNTAIN TO COLLECT MINERALS FOR THEIR "FOUR MOUNTAINS JISH" AND HERBS FOR THEIR MEDICINE BUNDLES.

Navajos had evolved toward humanity, culture, and harmony. First Man built it on a magic blue blanket, then pinned it to the earth with his knife to keep it from floating away. He made it beautiful with turquoise and assigned Blue Flint Girl to live on Mosca Peak, guarded forever by Big Snake, and forever guarding the Navajos from chaos.

I can see the Turquoise Mountain from my Albuquerque home. It rises on the horizon—a ragged indigo line against garish sunsets, snowcapped in winter, wearing a scarf of blowing clouds in the windy spring, forming the base for towering thunderstorms in the summer. When smog fills the Rio Grande Valley, it seems to float above the earth as if First Man's magic knife had slipped. It is only sixty-five miles away, but it reminds me of a different world.

My favorite place on that mountain is easy to reach—a fast drive west on Interstate 40 to Grants, then State Road 547 into the San Mateo Mountains and upward on the forest service road to the Mosca Peak lookout. Long ago a fire swept through the forest here, leaving a jackstraw jumble of fallen timbers. Aspen and mountain mahogany have grown up through that woodpile now; young fir and spruce are making their comeback; and the meadows opened by the burn are blue and yellow with wild iris, columbine, and lupine. It is one of the places I have memorized. I can visit it by merely closing my eyes.

Navajo shamans come here to collect minerals for their "four mountains jish" and herbs for their medicine bundles. You sometimes see the painted stick-and-feather prayer plumes they leave as offerings for what they have taken. It was here in Navajo mythology that Monster Slayer and Born for Water, his thoughtful twin brother, killed Walking Giant with arrows of lightning. It is here that Father Sky touches his hand to that of Mother Earth.

I like to come on summer afternoons when the Turquoise Mountain is playing its role as mother of the thunderstorms. Last August I sat on a log watching the drifting mist erase the forest around me, recreate it, then hide it again. The rumble and thump of thunder in the surrounding clouds could have been the remembered sound of the epic struggle of Walking Giant and Monster Slayer. Then the storm moved eastward, leaving silence behind. A faint breeze brought in the smell of rain and forest dampness, the sound of a horned lark somewhere out there in the mist, and the sorrowful call of a saw-whet owl. I found myself forgetting the violent odyssey of the Hero Twins and remembering another piece of Navajo mythic poetry. It teaches that to shelter Blue Flint Girl on this peak, First Man built "a house made of morning mist, a house made of dawn." On a day like that it was easy to believe that the holy girl still lives in

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such a house, just out of sight behind the fires, keeping her eternal promise to preserve harmony.

This empty, impoverished country west of Albuquerque holds many such places for me. Below the mountain, for example, is the Malpais, some eighty thousand acres of lava badlands produced by eruptions of this old volcano. The Navajos call it *Ye'iitsoh Bidil,* or "Monster's Blood," and their origin mythology makes it the congealed black blood of the ogre killed on the mountain. Traditional Navajos tend to avoid the lava, but to the neighboring Acoma Indians it is holy ground and a place where prayer sticks are left to the kachina spirits.

Interstate 40 crosses the north end of the Malpais, making it easy for those of us who enjoy such weirdness to find isolation in a surreal landscape. An old road wanders southwest from the interstate toward the village of Fence Lake. Anyone who likes to be alone can park beside that road, walk out into the lava, and have the planet to himself.

The Malpais was formed by a series of lava flows over eons of time. Some have been worn smooth over the past million years and are colored by layers of lichens. Some were created as recently as five hundred years ago and are still raw and ragged. Water falling here has no place to sink. It collects in potholes and bubbles up in springs where reeds grow and birds nest. The rodents and reptiles attracted by these little water holes take on the camouflage of a lava universe. Kangaroo rats and field mice here are black instead of tan, and lizards are sooty gray—thus less visible to the golden eagles and hawks hunting overhead.

At midsummer the Malpais is indeed "bad country." The high-altitude sun makes the basalt too hot to touch and the rattlesnakes are on the prowl for rodents. But on winter days, anyone who enjoys offbeat sensations can find them safely amid the lava. The solitude is absolute. A short tramp from the old road takes you to places where you can stare in every direction and see no sign that Earth is inhabited. Add the surrealism of the lava—like an ocean of black ink frozen midstorm—and one can imagine himself stranded in some lost galaxy.

On the spire of Shiprock, Monster Slayer almost met his match.

I have been prowling this empty corner of the Southwest for much of my life—the first twenty years simply because it appealed to me, and the next twenty because I use it as the setting of the novels I write about Navajos. Thus I have collected a variety of places that lift my spirit. Another of these is Shiprock, a Navajo sacred place.

The Navajos call it *Tse' Bit'a'i'*—"the Rock with Wings." It's the basaltic core of a volcano, once protected by a great cone of ash. Now, with the cone eroded away, the basalt throat rises out of an ocean of prairie grass like a Gothic cathedral built for giants. Its peak is 7,178 feet above sea level, and while that is lower than the Chuska Mountains just west on the Arizona border, the Chuskas are normal mountains. Shiprock isn't. It soars out of the earth, twenty stories taller from its grassy base than the World Trade Center towers are from the Manhattan pavements.

On the spire of this monolith, Monster Slayer almost met his match. After killing the Winged Monster and persuading the monster's nestlings to become the eagle and the owl, he found there was no way down. Spider Grandmother pitied him, finally, and lowered him to earth. The spire's sheer cliffs also attracted modern climbers until the Navajo Tribal Council declared that this holy place was off-limits to desecrating sportsmen.

I am attracted less by the spire and more by a related oddity. The same volcanism that produced the mountain produced three long cracks in the earth's shell. Through these, melted magma was forced up, like toothpaste, into the layer of ash the volcano had deposited. The same eons that eroded Shiprock's cone exposed these "rays." They extend miles from the central core—incredibly thin black walls. I miss no chance to reassure myself that they're as remarkable as I remember them.

Navajo Route 33, en route to Red Rock and the Lukachukai Mountains, crosses a gap in the most impressive of these rays. At the gap the wall is about two or three feet thick, perhaps twenty feet high. Here and there blocks of basalt have fallen out, leaving unlikely portholes. A track leaves the road in this gap and meanders along the foot of the talus below the wall. I walked down the top of the talus last November. It was twilight on a day when a weather front was bulging southward out of Utah, the sky had its stormy look, and the air smelled of snow. The wind was gusty, now hooting through the wall's ragged windows, now subsiding to a sigh. A sparrow hawk was balanced on the currents above, looking for a careless mouse. The basalt ray undulated southward, uphill and down, like a black and narrow version of the Great Wall of

China. At its end the spires of Shiprock were black against the sky.

That monolith and that once plastic wall always remind me of the force that cracked the earth there and pushed that molten rock upward. They are thoughts to put the triviality of the human species in perspective.

Other places and other moments stick in my memory.

Bosque del Apache wildlife refuge, for instance, down the Rio Grande from Socorro, with red January dawn outlining the Oscura Mountains. Suddenly a sound, growing rapidly: the awakening of thousands of waterfowl wintering there: snow geese awakening Canada geese, awakening sandhill cranes, awakening the mallards and the teal and the pintails. Then the air filling with geese, rising in a kaleidoscope of shifting formations, soaring high enough to be caught by the slanting sunlight, forming patterns against the gray velvet of the Coyote Hills, turning upriver toward you. In a moment the sky overhead is white with an infinity of geese. You hear nothing but their excited conversations. You look through a crack in time and glimpse how it was before the white man came.

Canyon de Chelly is another place that provokes the imagination into time travel. The canyon is filled with reminders of the people who occupied it for a thousand years and then faded away—leaving behind a wonderful supply of unanswered questions about where they went, and why, and why they never returned. Across the canyon from one of the cliff houses they abandoned, a trail leads down some six hundred feet from the rim to the sandy floor of Chinle Wash. You can wade across the shallow stream there (giving yourself a cheap thrill, if you like, by dabbling in the quicksand for which the place is famous) and reach the site we call White House Ruin. It was abandoned about eight hundred years ago by the people the Navajos named Anasazi (actually, *anaasa'zi*, or "ancestors of enemy people"). Below it is a little bosque of cottonwoods where I like to loaf.

THE LAST LOG USED IN AN ANASAZI STRUCTURE WAS CUT IN THE YEAR 1284.

It was here, twenty-five years ago, that the plot idea jelled for my first book—causing a fictional archaeologist to be trapped deep in just such a canyon and to escape captivity by knowing exactly how cliff dwellers built their houses. It was in this canyon that I first saw an Anasazi pictograph of Kokopela, a flute-playing version of Pan. And it was here one evening that I heard what seemed to be Kokopela's flute. It was faint at first, high notes rising and falling, coming nearer down the canyon and defying any but mythological explanations. Then a goat appeared around the canyon bend and with him, alas, came mundane reality. A flock was following him, many wearing bells. The echo of the cliffs blended the tinkling into a single song.

These pink sandstone cliffs are coated with tough, dark deposits of manganese oxide—the desert varnish that nature seems to have created for artists—and the Anasazis covered a lot of it with their drawings. You see human forms with horns and the feet of birds, their torsos decorated with handprints. You see oddly inhuman shapes holding hands, or linking arms, or armless. There are snakes, cryptic abstractions, and even a depiction that might explain what happened to these people—figures using lances and throwing sticks in combat with figures using bows, a deadlier weapon, which the Anasazis seem never to have mastered. Kokopela is everywhere, with his humpback and his little round head, in various shapes, forms, and positions—but always playing what looks like a clarinet. The Navajos have added him to their pantheon of spirits, calling him Water Sprinkler and making his hump a sack of seeds, and of troubles.

The Hopis who occupied this canyon later and know the Anasazis as their ancestors also left pictographs, as did the Navajos, who arrived later still. Hopi art is mostly abstract—clan totems and symbolic representations from migration stories. Navajo artists were more pragmatic. At the Standing Cow site there's a life-sized cartoon of a cow. Pale against the dark red stone up the canyon rides a column of men wearing wide-brimmed hats and carrying muskets. This column of Mexican troops came in 1805 and slaughtered scores of Navajos who had taken refuge upcanyon in what is now aptly called Massacre Cave. Kit Carson, with his militia and his Ute allies, rode into the canyon some sixty years later and repeated the slaughter.

It is particularly quiet in the canyon in the winter. Navajo families who summer there have moved back to their homes on Defiance Plateau and the tourist season has ended. The branch canyon (Del Muerto) where the structure called the Tower is built is narrow and the streaked cliffs soar toward a narrow slot of sky. On the sandy floor twilight comes early, but the sun still lights the top of the cliff. Archaeologists say the last log used in an Anasazi structure was cut in the year 1284 and

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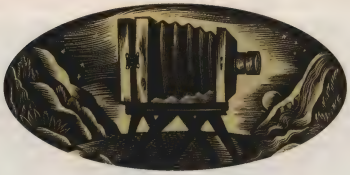
used in the Tower. They believe it was built by refugees who had abandoned the stone apartments at Mesa Verde. But as soon as they built it, something happened here, too, and civilization ended between these great red cliffs.

What happened? I lean against the cold cliff here in the premature twilight and watch the darkness move up it as the sun sets, thinking about these refugees. These artists, these builders, these religious people, seemed to have this side of the planet mostly to themselves. From what, then, were they fleeing? From what was the Tower built to defend them? What finally ended their civilization?

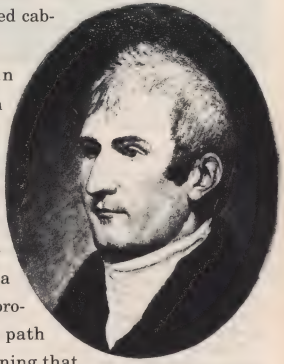
The Navajos have a story for that, as they do for everything. (Canyon de Chelly, for example, was created when Water Monster released a flood to force Coyote to return his kidnapped baby.) In the Navajo Wind Way legend, the Anasazi were the Blessed Ones. The Holy People had given them all the arts, from pottery and weaving to growing corn and domesticating animals, and taught them the Wind Way ceremonial to cure their illnesses. But the Anasazi became lazy and fell from grace. Illness came and they began misusing the Wind Way. This produced an immense, fiery whirlwind that swept them away and left the cliffs streaked and stained.

That explains why Navajo shamans use the Wind Way only as prescribed—to cure illness of mind and spirit. Perhaps it explains why so few burials are found around the Anasazi ruins. This story, and a thousand stories like it, explain why I come to this country when I feel the need for spirits, and to this canyon when I feel a need for ghosts.



MERIWETHER LEWIS: MURDER OR SUICIDE?

HE RODE IN FROM the west after fording the Tennessee River and the smaller Buffalo River, intersecting the old Indian trail known as the Natchez Trace. He followed the trace north through great forests and canebrakes a few miles to the stand—a clearing in the wilderness where stood two rough, mud-chinked cabins, smoke pluming from their chimneys.



Behind him rode his servant, a man named John Pernier, who led a packhorse laden with two bulky trunks, and behind Pernier rode a black man, the slave of John Neelly, the Indian agent of the Chickasaw Nation.

The sun was disappearing behind him as he spoke a few courtly words of greeting and introduced himself as the governor of Louisiana Territory to Mrs. Robert Grinder, the wife of the proprietor of the inn, who stood nervously in the path between the cabins. He asked for lodging, explaining that

BY HUGH McCORD

he was en route to Nashville and Washington, and that his companion Neelly had gone off the trail to recover some strayed horses, but would be along soon. Mrs. Grinder was fearful: her husband was away, leaving her to mind the cabins with their two small children and a black servant girl named Malinda, and the Natchez Trace was notorious for the land pirates, outlaws, thieves, and murderers hiding in the forests. But the man standing before her, while strange in his measured, lawyerlike speech and the fevered look in his eyes, was clearly a person of substance—the governor of the Territory!—so she offered him the vacant cabin and a warm meal.

After Pernier and Neelly's slave took his trunks into the cabin, the governor instructed them to take the animals to the nearby barn and to remain with them for the night. The servant girl, Malinda, brought food to the barn for the men. The governor ate sparingly of the meal Mrs. Grinder had prepared and left for him. Then, throwing a bearskin on the rude planked floor of the cabin, he retired for the last night of his life.

The date was October 10, 1809, and the man who occupied the cabin at Grinder's Stand that night was eminent, indeed—much more so than Mrs. Grinder then knew.

He was Meriwether Lewis, not merely the governor of Louisiana Territory—a prominent enough position in the still largely trackless and rough-hewn American frontier—but a man who had been a soldier, President Thomas Jefferson's private secretary, and, only six years before, leader of the first expedition to cross the North American continent from the Mississippi to the Pacific Coast.

The death of Meriwether Lewis, at the young age of thirty-five, in the late night or early morning hours of October 10–11, 1809 (even the time is uncertain), is among the most unsettling of the unsolved mysteries of American history.

THE DEATH OF MERIWETHER LEWIS IS AMONG THE MOST UNSETTLING OF THE UNSOLVED MYSTERIES OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

Virtually everything we know of his death derives from the testimony of Mrs. Grinder (whose first name is unknown and who was probably illiterate), filtered through others. Mrs. Grinder told her story many times, each time adding new information to what she had said before, and was still telling these stories thirty years after the event.

A rough distillation of her various accounts of the tragedy is this: Before he retired, she heard Lewis striding back and forth in the path between the cabins, talking to himself "like a lawyer." A bit later (or perhaps a bit before) this incident, three men rode into the stand to ask for lodging but were threatened by Lewis, who stood by his cabin with a brace of pistols. They rode on.

At about three o'clock in the morning of October 11 (she did not know the time; it may have been considerably earlier) she heard two (or perhaps three) gunshots. A few minutes later she heard Lewis at the door of her cabin asking for water. ("Oh, madame! Give me some water and heal my wounds!" is the way one writer interpreted Mrs. Grinder's recounting of Lewis's words.) She was terrified, alone in the pitch-black night, and would not open the door. She later heard the scraping of a gourd dipper in a water bucket.

She waited about two hours. At dawn, still too frightened to investigate the gunshots herself, she sent her two children to the barn to awaken the two men who slept there. The servants found Lewis in the cabin, unconscious, lying on his blood-soaked bearskin, a piece of his forehead blown away and the brain exposed, another gaping wound in his chest. He died about two hours later without, apparently, regaining consciousness.

In another account, Mrs. Grinder said Lewis, after asking her for water, had crawled away to a point north of the cabin and out of her vision and was found there after dawn by Pernier, who took him back to the cabin, where Lewis died soon after.

Yet another version of the story, allegedly told by Mrs. Grinder to the Indian agent Neelly, is that Lewis, after asking for water, returned to his cabin. When the servants arrived there at dawn, he cut himself repeatedly with a razor and told Neelly's slave he was killing himself to deprive his enemies of the pleasure of murdering him.

Whatever the precise circumstances, Meriwether Lewis died violently at Grinder's Stand that night of October 10 or morning of October 11, and after Neelly arrived on the scene, was hastily buried about four hundred feet north of the cabins. His coffin was made from a felled oak split into four sections, joined with wooden pegs.

Although there exists no written evidence of it, oral tradition has it that a coroner's inquest was

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held at Grinder's Stand, or nearby, and that the verdict was suicide, with two jurors favoring the verdict of murder. His grave remained unmarked for thirty-nine years, but when the Tennessee legislature got around to erecting a monument on the supposed site of his grave in 1848, the commissioners asserted that Lewis "probably died at the hands of an assassin."

Suicide or murder?

Thomas Jefferson, Lewis's mentor and the man, more than any other, responsible for Lewis's achievements as explorer and politician, believed his admirable friend had killed himself. William Clark, Lewis's partner in the great Corps of Discovery expedition across the continent, also believed the suicide theory, as do most of the historians of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Lewis's mother is said to have stoutly maintained to her death that her son was murdered and had no hesitation in pointing the finger at her choice of culprit, John Pernier.

While it is unlikely, over 180 years after the fact, that new evidence will surface to solve the puzzle of the death of Meriwether Lewis, a recounting of the circumstances that led him to the Tennessee wilderness may shed some light on what happened to him at Grinder's Stand.

The Meriwether Lewis who rode into the Natchez Trace in the fall of 1809 was a far different man from the one who had, with William Clark, taken a party of thirty young soldiers and French boatmen from near St. Louis up the uncharted Missouri River in the spring of 1804. Much had happened to the man who had cajoled and mother-henned the Corps of Discovery as it labored and portaged over the Rocky Mountains, crossed the Continental Divide, journeyed by keelboat, pirogue, and canoe the Columbia River to the Pacific. It took a strict, decisive, self-assured commander to take a crew of men over four thousand miles of pristine wilderness inhabited by tribes of Indians who had never before seen a white man, combating fatigue, insects, and the ferocity of nature, and then back again—a two-and-a-half-year path-marking venture unrivaled in exploration history.

LEWIS CHANGED RADICALLY AFTER THE END OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION.

William Clark, a courageous and cool-headed soldier, was his co-equal in leading the expedition, but the heart of the Corps of Discovery—the man personally selected by President Jefferson to lead it—was Meriwether Lewis.

Lewis changed radically, so say dependable accounts, after the great event ended. He became a man of mercurial temper—on the one hand impulsive, on the other given to self-doubt and melancholia. He worried about his health and dosed himself with pills, powders, and various nostrums, many containing opiates. Always introspective, he became a sentimental and solitary man, and appears to have been plagued by a sort of mental paralysis and inertia.

After Jefferson named him governor of Upper Louisiana Territory in March 1807, Lewis dawdled a full year in Washington, Philadelphia, and Virginia before taking up the post. He came down ill with a fever, scouted for a publisher for his massive exploration journals, hired from dwindling personal resources naturalists and artists to illustrate the work, sat for portraits, fell in and out of love, and even managed to take offense at something Jefferson said or wrote—more than likely a scolding for not using his time to write the text for the great book. (Lewis died without submitting a publishable line of it.)

He turned more and more to alcohol, fretted more and more about what lay before him in contrast to what lay behind, and in March 1808, probably still ill from a malarial fever, troubled over his future and finances, and drinking heavily, he finally reached St. Louis to take up his post as governor.

In his unremarkable year and a half as governor, Lewis's personal affairs and mental state continued to plummet. He earned, almost instantly, the great enmity of the territorial secretary, a peculiarly vindictive man named Frederick Bates, who flatly said to others that the governor was "insane." He lost money in land speculation in St. Louis while spending more and more commissioning artists for maps, paintings, and drawings for his journals. And he fell afoul of the War and Treasury Departments in Washington. This latter grievance, based on the refusal of the federal government to honor the vouchers he submitted for payments made out of his $2,000 annual salary for official territorial business, was the principal reason, together with his continuing search for a publisher, that he decided to return to Washington in the fall of 1809.

Another theory is that Lewis needed to visit Washington to turn over to the government evidence of the traitorous conduct of Gen. James Wilkinson, his predecessor as governor, who had illegal dealings with the Spanish government. Five months after

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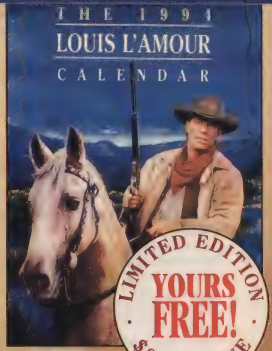

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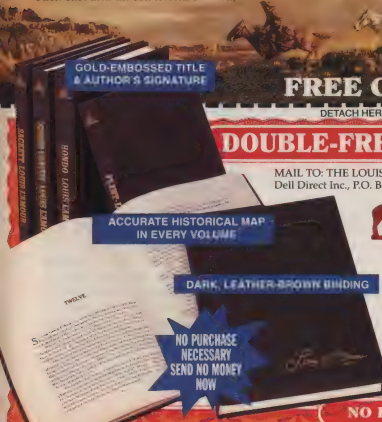
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Lewis's death, Wilkinson was summoned to Washington to answer charges of collusion with Spanish officials, but he was cleared and permitted to return to his duties in New Orleans. In 1813, however, he was court-martialed for these offenses. He died in exile in Mexico City in 1825. Adding fuel to this theory is the belief that it explains the sudden and insubordinate conduct of the territorial secretary Frederick Bates, a close associate of Wilkinson's who may have had reason to fear Lewis's mission to Washington.

On September 4, Governor Lewis left St. Louis by riverboat, accompanied by his servant, John Pernier (or *Pernia*—the correct spelling is unknown; he is variously described as a Creole, Frenchman, Spaniard, and mulatto), and four large trunks of clothing, personal belongings, and papers, including the sixteen notebooks comprising the journals of the Corps of Discovery. On the trip downriver to Fort Pickering (site of the city of Memphis today), Lewis made out his will, leaving all his real and personal property to his mother.

He arrived at Pickering in hot and muggy weather on September 15, quite ill—perhaps suffering from malaria—and dosing himself with various potions. Capt. Gilbert Russell, commander at the fort, wrote to then ex-President Jefferson three months after Lewis's death that the governor was "in a state of mental derangement" and that crewmen on the riverboat said Lewis had twice tried to kill himself during the voyage.

Russell is the only recorded spokesman for this information. If what he said is true, it heavily supports those who believe Lewis finished the job at Grinder's Stand.

Lewis's purported mental derangement did not prevent him from writing a clearly worded letter at Fort Pickering to President James Madison explaining why he had decided to travel overland and not on shipboard: He feared a coming war with the British and that his journals and papers might fall into enemy hands in New Orleans.

THE CURRENCY LEWIS HAD WITH HIM, ABOUT A HUNDRED DOLLARS, WAS NEVER FOUND.

The British were not in New Orleans at this time, but Lewis may have acted on erroneous intelligence. The Wilkinson theorists point out that the general was in command of the army post at New Orleans and that it was Wilkinson Lewis really feared.

On September 29, Lewis left Fort Pickering for the Tennessee River. The only testimony we have of his conduct on the trail for the next eleven days is that of the mysterious John Neelly, agent for the Chickasaw Nation.

Little is known of Neelly. He was a former militiaman commissioned as the Chickasaw agent less than three months before he met Lewis at Fort Pickering. He was intensely disliked by Capt. Russell, the commander at Fort Pickering, and was dismissed by the Secretary of War as agent in July 1812, for "hostility to the Indians."

The peculiar fact about Neelly is that he came into Fort Pickering from Chickasaw territory, at least one hundred miles to the east, only three days before Lewis arrived, and he apparently volunteered to accompany Lewis back toward Nashville. His reason for this rather extravagant largesse is unknown, unless it was to ingratiate himself to the governor, but it is Neelly alone who testified, in a letter to Jefferson, that Lewis appeared "deranged of mind" on the trail and it is Neelly who first reported Mrs. Grinder's account of Lewis's death.

Lewis left two of his four trunks behind at the fort with instructions that they be forwarded to him in Washington, and together with his servant Pernier, Neelly and his slave (whose name is not recorded), and perhaps a few Chickasaw Indians (the record is not clear), departed Fort Pickering on September 29. A day's ride from the Tennessee River two pack horses were lost, and Neelly stayed behind to locate them. In the evening of October 10, the governor and the two servants arrived at Grinder's Stand.

A few hours later Meriwether Lewis was dead.

Neelly rode into the stand during the forenoon of October 11, leading one of the two strayed horses. He left no record of what he found as he entered the clearing and rode up to the cabins. In the letter he wrote to Jefferson, Neelly said that he had possession of Lewis's trunks, rifle, silver watch, brace of flintlock pistols, dirk, and tomahawk, all of which he subsequently forwarded to Jefferson. And he related to the former president the story Mrs. Grinder had told him.

The currency Lewis had with him, about a hundred dollars, was never found.

John Pernier, taking Lewis's packhorse with him, traveled on to Virginia and paid a visit to Lewis's family near Charlottesville, where he attempted to collect $240 in back wages he said was owed him. The result of the visit was to convince Lewis's

mother that Pernier had murdered her son.

Pernier died seven months after Lewis from an overdose of laudanum. What connection, if any, there is between Lewis's and Pernier's use of opiates is unknown.

What happened at Grinder's Stand?

The murder advocates ask if a veteran soldier and frontiersman familiar with his weapons would fail twice (or was it three times?) to kill himself with his flintlock pistols. If he had shot himself three times, he would have had to reload one of his pistols—a laborious process for a man with a wound in his skull or chest. They point to such suspicious characters as James Neelly and John Pernier. And theorize that the culprit may have been an assassin in the hire of Gen. James Wilkinson or the territorial secretary Frederick Bates; one of the numerous thugs who infested the Natchez Trace; the men Lewis allegedly threatened at Grinder's Stand that evening; or perhaps even Robert Grinder, owner of the stand, whose absence from the entire episode seems peculiar.

But there is no evidence.

The suicide theorists point to heavier, if inconclusive, data: that Lewis was despondent, sick, addicted to alcohol, and harried by debt; that sources as varied as Capt. Russell, Neelly, and Mrs. Grinder described his behavior as "deranged"; and that his greatest friends—Thomas Jefferson and William Clark—had no difficulty in believing he killed himself.

But there is no evidence.

Ultimately, as bothersome and unsatisfactory as it is, we are left with the mystery and with the inscription on the monument raised at the site of Grinder's Stand in 1848 to honor Lewis. On the base of it are quoted Jefferson's words:

"His courage was undaunted, his firmness and perseverance yielded to nothing but impossibilities; a rigid disciplinarian, yet tender as a father of those committed to his charge; honest, disinterested, liberal, with a sound understanding and a scrupulous fidelity to truth."

THE LEWIS MONUMENT AT GRINDER'S STAND

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To reach the Meriwether Lewis Monument from Memphis, take Interstate 40 to Route 412 through Lexington and into Lewis County to the town of Hohenwald, then go seven miles on Route 20 to the Natchez Trace Parkway and into Grinder's Stand. From Nashville, take Route 31 south to Route 412 into Gordonsburg, then the Natchez Trace Parkway.

SUGGESTED READING

- Vardis Fisher. **Suicide or Murder? The Strange Death of Governor Meriwether Lewis** (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press reprint of original 1962 edition, 1993).
- David Lavender. **The Way to the Western Sea: Lewis and Clark Across the Continent** (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

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A CONVERSATION WITH

JOHN

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JOHN JAKES IS A WRITER OF DISTINCTIONS, plural. A legion of readers associate him with his spectacularly successful Kent Family Chronicles, a series of eight fat novels (*The Bastard, The Rebels, The Seekers, The Furies, The Titans, The Warriors, The Lawless,* and *The Americans*). These books were published between 1974 and 1980 in celebration of the American Bicentennial, and sold over forty million copies. He is equally celebrated for his North and South trilogy (*North and South*, 1982; *Love and War*, 1984; *Heaven and Hell*, 1987), for his bestselling *California Gold* (1989), and for his 1993 family saga, *Homeland*, which takes place in Chicago, where he was born in 1932. And science fiction fans know him as author of the Brak the Barbarian stories of the 1960s and other science fiction and fantasy works.

John Jakes with Native American actor Gregory Zaragoza, who plays a ferocious Cheyenne named Scar in the forthcoming TV miniseries, *Heaven and Hell*, based on Jakes's book.

PHOTO BY YERN EVANS/ABC

JAKES

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History is high drama, full of greed, ambition, villainy... all the stuff of which good stories are made.

But before all these distinctions, John Jakes was a western writer. His first published novel, *The Texans Ride North* (1952), was a juvenile western; his first adult novel, *Wear a Fast Gun* (1956), was a western. He sold western stories to a variety of pulp magazines while he was a student at DePauw University; he combined western and science fiction themes in his *Six-Gun Planet* (1970); and western settings, themes, and characters have appeared in many of his mainstream novels.

In his 1993 Bantam collection of western stories, *In the Big Country*, Jakes says, "Stories of the West between covers and on the screen have been a joyful part of my life for a long time."

Jakes responded to *LLWM* questions from his home on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

LLWM: You began writing westerns when you were a teenager. What was there about the West that lured you?

JAKES: I was entranced by the excitement, the thrills of the first westerns I encountered. The very first memory I have is of sitting in one of those barnlike movie palaces, in Terre Haute, Indiana, watching Errol Flynn in *Dodge City*. I was taken with Flynn's panache—his derring-do. This would be in 1939, when the picture came out. I was seven.

LLWM: I take it that, like most kids who loved western movies, whatever history was in the film didn't interest you then?

JAKES: Even though many of Flynn's pictures purported to be "historical," I learned later the history was phonied up. This aspect didn't interest me anyway. I went for the action. I graduated to the B-picture programmers on Saturday matinees, and the western pulps—the exploits of Texas Ranger Jim Hatfield, the Rio Kid, and so on.

LLWM: Virtually all your novels are historically based. Do you research a lot before you write? How important is sound history in fictional works?

JAKES: I do research my subjects extensively before I write. A typical two- to two-and-a-half-year time track for a novel is at least 50 percent full-time research. And research is ongoing throughout the writing. I have a passion for accuracy. I figure that if I'm going to purport to describe historical events, the facts had better be right. I set up every novel, first and foremost, as a good strong story. But I also treat it as though it might be the only book on a given period that a reader will ever see.

LLWM: It's odd, but much of what people know about history seems to have been gained from reading fiction.

JAKES: Readers constantly write to say they hated history as conventionally presented in text-

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books, or taught in school. In reality, history is high drama, full of greed, ambition, villainy, adultery, heroism, sacrifice, violence, and bloodshed—all the stuff of which good stories are made. Reid Beddow, now deceased, was a fine editor of the *Washington Post Book World*. He once said, "History is a higher order of soap opera." It's absolutely true. When presented as it really happened, history exceeds the wildest imaginings of any fiction writer.

LLWM: In attempting to define the western story, the broad view, one to which I believe you subscribe, has it as inclusive of any of our various frontiers. Were James Fenimore Cooper and William Gilmore Simms western writers by your definition?

JAKES: Yes, I absolutely take the broad view, the inclusive view of westerns. One of my favorite pulps was *Frontier Stories*, which specialized in tales of the French and Indian War, the Kentucky frontier and that era. I call Cooper and Simms writers of "easterns," but they are part of the larger body of literature that includes what we think of as the conventional, or cowboy, western—even the dime novel.

LLWM: You have written about the "ghettoization" of the western story. Could you expand on that a bit?

JAKES: Sometime after the wild popularity of TV westerns waned, western novels seemed to disappear from normal paperback distribution channels. They were seen, if at all, on revolving wire racks at drugstores, in bus stations, and at obscure newsstands. You never saw them at "better" bookstores. There were geographic ghettos, as well. I saw virtually no paperback westerns before we left Ohio for the South in 1978, but saw slightly more of them in this part of the country. I presume they were also somewhat better distributed from Texas westward.

LLWM: Who was responsible for the ghettoization?

JAKES: The ghetto walls—walls of editorial decision, distribution, and marketing, or the lack thereof—I suppose were put up by publishing people who believed western novels were passé, and by movie people who were mesmerized by the explosive success of special-effects films such as *Star Wars*. (Of course, you can make a good case for the Lucas space pictures being westerns in disguise.) Louis L'Amour broke out of the ghetto by virtue of his popularity as an individual writer.

LLWM: Are you concerned that the success of the printed western

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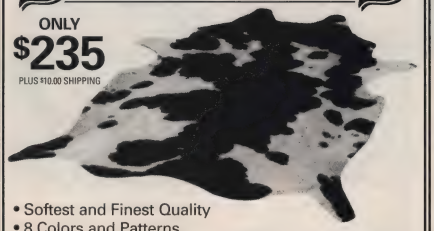

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The western contains all the elements of great myth: man against nature; man against his own nature; good men versus bad.

story seems so dependent on whether or not Hollywood is producing successful western films?

JAKES: It's too bad that Hollywood's attention, or lack of it, is a determining factor in the renewed popularity of westerns. As just another example of life's constant changes, we are seeing the emergence of giant film-TV-publishing combines. The influence of the moving image on print fiction is both new and probably irreversible. Still, I'd rather have *something* influencing the bounce-back of western novels, short stories, and pictures, than nothing.

LLWM: Are readers disappearing? What has happened to those who used to love the printed word?

JAKES: Although library usage, and book sales, continue to rise—but maybe not as fast as the population—love of the printed word seems threatened. Many people have given up the exercise of the imagination required by books and old-time radio drama, for having everything shown to them on a screen. But I don't really believe the printed word will die out—there is just too much power in it. It's like the seasonal predictions of the death of Broadway. It never happens.

LLWM: One subject of ongoing concern for you is the decline of our public libraries. What is happening to them?

JAKES: Yes, it is a subject that worries me. Polls show that a majority of Americans, individually, will always vote in favor of spending tax money for libraries. It's the politicians—the town and county councils, the state legislators, faced with budget crunches—who mistakenly perceive libraries as "frills." This results in reduction of hours, cancellation of services such as bookmobiles and delivery of books to shut-ins and the elderly, sometimes actual library closings. It's happening all over America. Militant citizens who love libraries must reeducate politicians.

LLWM: The western story seems to rise and fall in popularity, but never dies, and remains a publishing staple 170 years after Cooper's first Leatherstocking tale and 130 years after the first western dime novel. How do you account for its durability?

JAKES: The western contains all the elements of great myth: man against nature; man against his own nature; good men versus bad—I use *men* in the nonsexist, shorthand mode. Also, I think the whole frontier story, in both its noble and despicable aspects, can rightly be called "the matter of America," just as the Arthurian legend is called "the matter of Britain." The only subject vying with the West for that status is our apocalyptic Civil War. Those two chunks of American history exert a worldwide fascination.

LLWM: The TV miniseries pro-

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Long ago, my people wandered into this country and saw many elk. We took only what we needed and lived at one with nature. Many mountain men came into our land, and we welcomed them. They also hunted the elk. As I look back... all of the hunters needed the elk, but the elk needed no one. The wolf, grizzly, eagle and the mountain men have long since gone from this land, and I am but a spirit... but the elk remain.

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The western is definitely changing its focus—broadening it, becoming more inclusive.

duction of your *Heaven and Hell* novel has just wrapped up in San Antonio, I understand. Have you been satisfied with the films made from your novels?

JAKES: Yes, very definitely. For the North and South pictures, I was lucky to be associated with one of the finest producers in the business, David L. Wolper—a true showman, in the best sense of the word. I am lucky from another standpoint. Having worked a good deal in the theater, I understand the difference between a play or a movie, which is a collaborative project involving many creative talents, and a novel, which is essentially a solo act. Many writers don't grasp the difference, which brings them to unnecessary grief. An adaptation is always just that—something that is condensed, rearranged, but is most definitely *not* the novel itself. Even a bad adaptation doesn't hurt the original work. And readers are very smart: they understand that something terrible on the screen usually isn't the fault of the original author. Of course I'm always grateful to have a *good* adaptation, and have been pretty lucky in that department.

LLWM: What can you tell us of the *Heaven and Hell* adaptation?

JAKES: It's to be a six-hour TV miniseries, to air on ABC in February 1994. I have not read the final scripts, but the first versions, written by a friend, Suzanne Clauser, were first-rate. She has been a top Hollywood screenwriter for more than twenty years and has a special feel for frontier material. I spent a few days on a large ranch in Floresville, Texas, in September, where the *Heaven and Hell* company was closing out a two-and-a-half-month shoot with a series of big action sequences.

Something like a hundred Native Americans of all ages had come together from Oklahoma to enact the roles of Southern Cheyenne. I was told that tribal elders had vetted the scripts and given their approval, which was good news. Also present were a number of black actors playing members of the Tenth Negro Cavalry. "Negro" was part of the government's official designation of the regiment in the 1860s—the famed Buffalo Soldiers. I heard that some or all of these men hailed from Detroit and had a special program of visiting schools to present the laudable history of the black Plains cavalry.

LLWM: Something eminently filmable of yours is that story, "Carolina Warpath" (an "eastern western" set in the British Carolinas in the 1720s that appears in the Bantam collection, *In the Big Country*.) Do you have future plans for those great characters, Nick Bray and his partner, Huger Noggins?

JAKES: Nick and Noggins will certainly continue on if I can help it. I live smack in the middle of what was once the Wild East. I just about flipped out when I discovered, in a University of South Carolina history class, that Carolina in its colonial period had "cattle minders"—true antecedents of the western cowboy. Who could resist writing about that scene? Of course, I face the same problem that confronts anyone who wants to write shorter western material: available markets. I won't write stories in a vacuum. I'm really hoping this magazine will begin to fill that vacuum.

LLWM: Me, too. Who are the writers you admire?

JAKES: Since I write large, sprawling novels, I am most certainly in debt to the nineteenth century English and French novelists such as Dickens—an idol of mine—Balzac, Zola, Thackeray, and, from farther east, Count Tolstoy. I love stellar writers for the theater, all the way from Shakespeare—not only a genius of a poet and a shrewd psychologist, but a complete man of the theater who knew the tricks of professional playwriting way back in the days of Elizabeth I—to Neil Simon, to newer writers such as Robert Schenkkan, whose *The Kentucky Cycle*, a Pulitzer Prize winner, opened in November 1993 on Broadway.

LLWM: Among western writers?

JAKES: I've always enjoyed Jack Schaefer, Will Henry, Steve Frazee, Dan Cushman, and, of course, Louis L'Amour. When I was recovering in the hospital from a serious operation in 1977, all I wanted was a good meal and a L'Amour novel. I couldn't get the former but my wife brought me the latter. I consider Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* a masterpiece, and Cormac McCarthy shows signs of nudging into that category, too. McCarthy, in books such as *Blood Meridian* and

All the Pretty Horses, has descriptive powers that make you want to weep for joy and gnash your teeth with professional envy.

LLWM: You've been lately editing a collection of all-new western stories by members of Western Writers of America, and the western appears to be on one of its cyclical upward trends. What have you discovered about the "new" western story?

JAKES: In editing the forthcoming anthology, I found some strong new trends in the eighty-plus submissions my coeditor and I received. If these stories are a barometer, then the western is definitely changing its focus—broadening it, becoming more inclusive. The traditional western is by no means gone, but it's being challenged by new writers with fascinating new approaches. For example, we bought a story titled "The Death(s) of Billy the Kid" that I can only describe as a western as it might be done if a French Impressionist turned from painting to writing. It's just remarkable. Not everybody will like these new directions, but you can't control or stop change.

LLWM: Do you see a new generation of readers attracted to the western story?

JAKES: I think a new generation of readers will rediscover the West with delight and surprise. They'll rediscover the excitement, the color, the brave struggles, the tragedies—the deep human issues that the often dark yet heroic frontier experience encompasses.

LLWM: More on a personal note: *Homeland* has gotten almost uniformly great reviews. Will you continue the Crown family saga?

JAKES: The reviews of *Homeland* are by far the best I've ever received. It is a very long book, much in the nineteenth century tradition and perhaps too long for contemporary readers. It definitely was not and is not the "beach book" some said. But the mail tells me that those who take the time to read it love it despite its length. I intend to continue the adventures of other members of the Crown family in the twentieth century—God and the publisher willing.

LLWM: And beyond the Crowns?

JAKES: I have more subjects that I'd like to deal with than I have years left in my life. I want to do a full-length novel about my Carolina frontier characters. I have a thick sheaf of notes and ideas for western short stories. I yearn to do a novel about the Napoleonic period. Another about the theater—actors. I wish I was twenty or thirty years younger.

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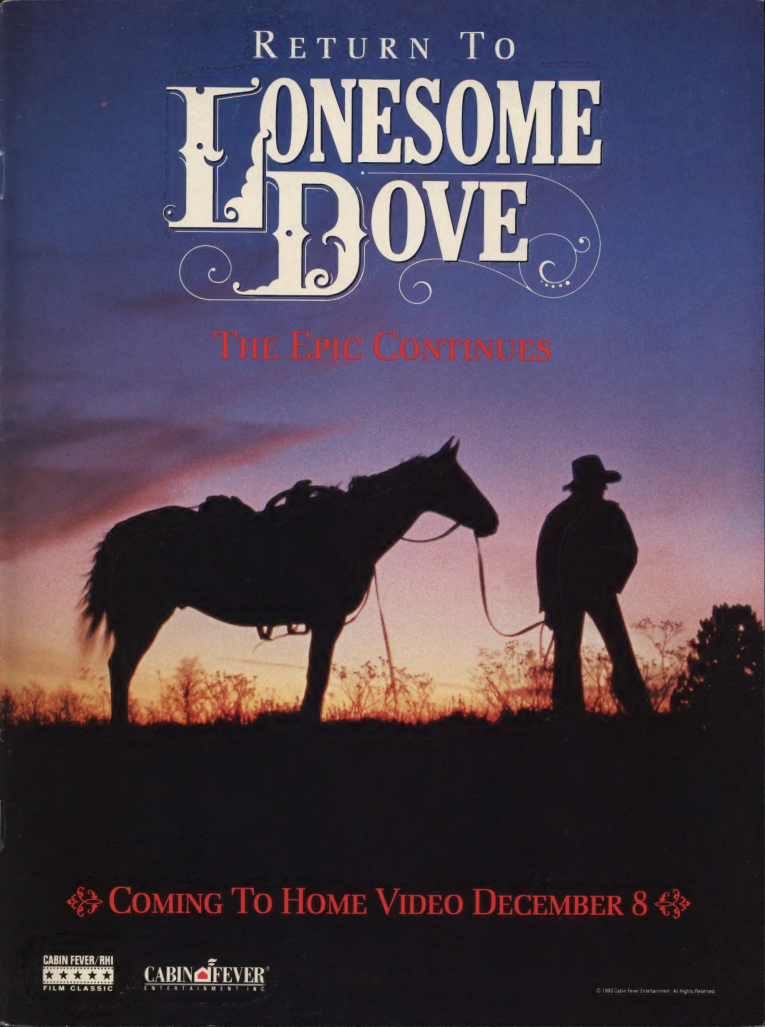
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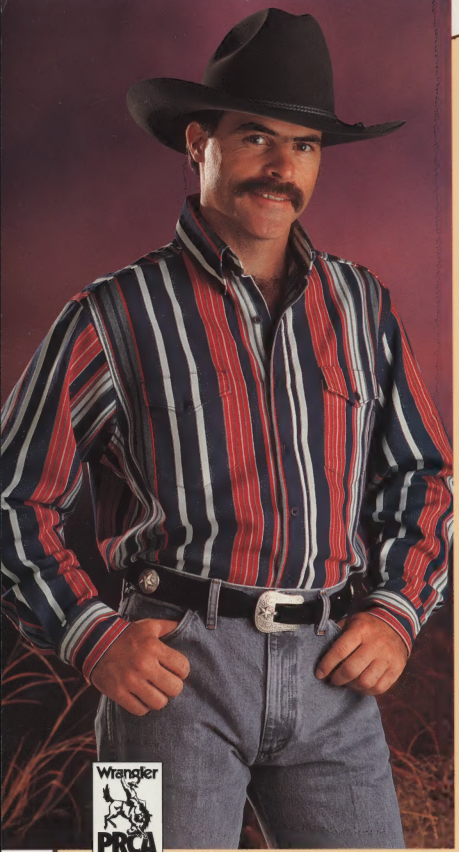

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